Things we see, yet never saw coming
How do we stand still, yet feel like we're running?
Away from ourselves, most times we cause our own pain.
Constantly feeling as if we're going insane!
No one to blame, no lame excuse to use
Simply lack of understanding and the life styles we choose.

check out the rest of Talia's BWO piece on page 50

EDITOR'S NOTE VOLUME 11.44

There are times when Abraham Lincoln's stirring definition of democracy — "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" — actually seems to apply to us! This week, the U.S. held a national election that shifted the center of gravity in Washington D.C. It represents a monumental change, leaving things in the houses of power shaken up as if they had just suffered through a magnitude 8 earthquake!

It's hard not to take some pride in this accomplishment, to celebrate one of our greatest national strengths: the participation of the public in how they are governed from the top. There is so much that we wish we could change about our government and how it treats the least among us. We wish that tax breaks that help the rich get richer would, instead, go to the poor — so that the many money-related problems could become a thing of the past for people who have never known what it is to have enough. We wish that, instead of pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into prison and jail construction (not to mention all the new juvenile halls that are springing up around here like lovely toadstools), we would invest much earlier in the welfare of our children by providing the best education for free for as long as anyone wants to attend school — so that we would have an educated citizenry, able to find productive work and put their educated minds to use solving some of the nation's and the world's problems. We wish that we would seriously address our own moral failings in this country, like allowing children to live in poverty and the air we breathe to become foul and poisonous, rather than acting as the world's moral judges — so that we could end some of the worst problems we have, including torture of prisoners, and also reduce the world's growing anger at us. We wish our great national slogans were more than just words on a page, like "Equal Justice Under Law" and "All men are created equal" — so that we could reduce our national hypocrisy.

And yet, we have just been shown the strong evidence that in this country, the people can alter the course their government takes. Yesterday, the Republicans — the party of the President — were humiliated and defeated all around the country as the other party (the Democrats) gained the majority in the House of Representatives after a dozen years out of power. (The election in the Senate is too close to call as we write this ed note, but it, too, looks like it will fall out of Republican control and into the hands of the Democrats.) And yet, even in this moment where we can celebrate the fact that "the people have spoken," the sad truth is that most of the people spoke through silence. Less than half of those who could have voted actually did so. Those who did not vote have contributed to all the problems affecting our communities by not taking the basic opportunity given to them to make changes in how our government operates, and who is at the controls operating it (and the non-voters include far too many young people with the power to vote but not the desire or willingness to get up off their butts and do it, even when there are issues on the ballot that the young care passionately about, like increasing the cigarette tax [which was defeated] and increasing prison penalties for certain kinds of crimes [it passed]...)!

The greatest strength of a democracy — when it is working properly — is the power it gives ordinary people like us to stand up to the government and say, "No!" That is what happened in this week's election, and it happened in every state in the country. Americans (who voted) were fed up with many things, such as (to name a few): the endless war in Iraq that is costing us $1.4 billion every single week, and has cost the lives of nearly 3,000 young American men and women and as many as 500,000 Iraqis; the corruption that leads too many of our so-called leaders to line their own pockets with money extorted from those doing "business" with them; the Washington scandals that have seen high-ranking members of Congress turn a blind eye to a Congressman's sexual advances toward 16-year-old boys working for him; the huge and growing gap between those at the top of the economic "miracle" that turns some people into millionaires while leaving more and more people, especially women and children, trying to survive below the poverty line; the failure of our educational system for those who cannot afford private schools; the violence of our streets and of our world-wide relationships; and so much more.

The power and strength we are talking about is not the particular outcome of this election. It is not that the Democrats are taking control of Congress away from the Republicans that moves us to describe what has happened as something to applaud proudly. No, what's best about our form of government is simply the fact that the people are empowered to flip off the government, to give the President the finger, to express their profound displeasure at the way things are going, to demand that their leaders change direction, and to say as loudly as they can, "No!"

But look how long it took for the public finally to get fed up! Which leads us to wonder how much people are willing to put up with before they finally get to that point. And that leads us to examine the great weakness of this country at the same time we're applauding its strengths — and that weakness is that we have to be pushed so far, and we put up with so much evil and slime and corruption for so many years, before we finally get to that critical point of standing up for ourselves and saying, "No!" Which leads us back to our readers, our writers... and ourselves.

How much evil is each of us willing to tolerate and accommodate before we have the courage to say, "No"? How far do you have to be pushed in a negative direction before you have the strength to stand up for yourself and say, "No"? How many times do you have to put yourself in the hands of the system and lose your freedom before you have the courage to face your own contributions to that result, and say "No"? How many funerals of friends do you have to attend before you conclude that enough is enough and you find a power you didn't know you had to say "No"? How many tears does your mother have to shed because of you until it becomes too many tears... so many tears that you take a good hard look at yourself, and say, "No"?

If your first instinct is to point to the failings of others, we don't disagree. The President tells lies to keep himself and his party in power. Will he ever summon the shame he should feel, so that before the next lie falls from his lips, he says "No"? Will those business people at the top who exploit those workers at the bottom ever come to see their behavior as immoral, and say "No"? Will the police ever admit that they treat poor, black and brown neighborhoods very differently from the way they treat affluent and white neighborhoods, and that such unequal treatment is wrong, and say "No"? Will men who abuse women ever own up to the fact that it's only their physical strength that allows them to mistreat women, exposing a personal moral weakness, and say "No"? Will each of us in our own private lives own up to our greed, our prejudices, our ignorance, our little and big cruelties, our unreasonableness, our irrationality — and all the small and large things we do to make ourselves more comfortable or richer at the expense of others — and summon the courage finally to say "No"?

Yes, we could put all those questions to all those people, but only you are reading this editor's note, so we are directing these questions to you. As the voters demonstrated this week, the American public has the power to rise up and demand that their government make changes. And, as we see in so many of the fine pieces that appear every week in this unique and rich publication, each person here exercise the same power, except instead of forcing change at the top, they are acknowledging the need for change at the bottom — with themselves!

As we have seen, there comes a point where people can take no more, but where is that point? How far do you have to be pushed before you find the strength to say "No," the strength that can change a government or an individual? Let us end this rant where we began, with that greatest of U.S. Presidents, Abraham Lincoln, who said, "We — even we here — hold the power and bear the responsibility."

Moving right into this week's topics that were addressed prior to the writing in this issue were "Why Can't You Forgive?" - Has someone ever hurt you so much that until this day you can't forgive them? No matter how hard you try, or how much you try to fix things, it seems that forgiveness will never come. Is forgiveness good for the soul? If so, why is it so hard to forgive? Are there things that you wish to be forgiven for? What's preventing others from forgiving you? What's holding you back from forgiving them?

Our second topic, "Letter To A Lifer" -We know some of you keep hope by thinking, "Damn, I have to do all this time, but at least I'm getting out." Well, what about those that are not getting out, that are serving life sentences (or death sentences)? If you could write to one of these men or women, what advise would you want to give, and what advice would you want to get? What would you like to know about their lives?

This week we want you to write just such a letter. It doesn't have to be to anyone in particular. You can begin it, "Dear Lifer," or "Dear Death Row Inmate." There's only one way for us to know what you would write in a letter like that, and that's to have you write it. Remember that there are real lifers and death row inmates reading what you write, so please try not to insult anyone, but keep it real...

The third topic, "Brain Vs. Heart" -Some people use their brains more than their hearts, while others do the opposite. Which do you tend to use more? Do you deal with your thoughts more or do you deal with your emotions more? Do you think things through and consider the consequences of your actions (and the actions of others), or do you react out of emotion? In the great battle between mind and heart, where do you stand?

With all this shared and given you are reading our latest editorial commentary, we hope you now will consider writing in our (the 16th) editorial note writing contest. The contest question to consider writing on is, "A Letter To The President." For this contest we want you serious writers to write a letter to President Bush! It is our goal to not only post these letters in The Beat Within publication and our website, but to send them off to the White House, too! Now, do we need to suggest topics on what to talk about? Doubt it. So with this said, our contest question is all about you writing a letter to President Bush. (Don't write anything that will get you in trouble with the Office of Homeland Security...)

The contest submission deadline was Election Day, Tuesday, November 7, 2006, but as usual given our poor mailing system we decided to extend the contest until December 21, 2006. As is the case with all of our writing contests, all pieces submitted will be featured in the BWO (Beat Without) section of the "big" Beat over several issues. And once all have been featured, The Beat editors will read and vote on their four favorites. From these reads, our top-vote-getter will receive a one-hundred-dollar money order. Our second place winner will get a fifty-dollar money order. And our third and fourth-place winners will receive twenty-five-dollar money orders. Good luck writers!

One more thing, give us a few more lines to pay our great respects to this week's POW (Piece Of the Week) writers, they are Maya, Quis, Lifer, Lil' D, and Cash Money from SF/YGC. From 150 Crew we have Big Vic (writes two), Lil' Joe, and Aleshia. Last but not least we have Maile from Walden House PSK.

Before we call it a note, lets give praise to our old friend the very talented William Grajeda who drops a bomb on us in the BWO this week. We encourage you all to read his latest, "Hey! Can I Please Have A Moment Of Your Time, To Share Some Truths With You?" on page 40. You better believe we have seen the many many truths of William Grajeda over the years, we even had the great privilege of meeting him face to face a number of years ago, and have even worked with his little brother, Chris, and even published the work of his father! We so look forward to more tales and realities from this very powerful writer. This Beat is for you William! Thank you.

See you all next week!

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The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our commuities already–we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

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www.thebeatwithin.org

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PIECES OF THE WEEK

Holy

He only loves you...
But tha things we are chasin'
are replacin' tha face we love
from high up above
down to tha federal note
that hurts and kills
but we never seem to hold a grudge.

He only loves you...
But tha basic instructions
before heaven and earth,
curse atheist and agnostics
but with His loving hands and a lil' bit of faith
tha things that we chase
can surely be replaced
come face to face
with death and destruction
tha road you choose is based
upon your choices and decisions.
Now here comes tha conjunction:
Tha path you choose you can win...
Or you can lose... But still...

He only loves you...
When I die
I hope my soul rest in heavenly places
been baptized but still being chastised
from tha decisions I'm making.
It not tha end,
but where did it begin
cuttin' school, doin' tha fool
tryna impress my friends...
But upon tha date of my departure
I know what I started I finished well...
'cause He "still" loves me and guides me well.
I never make mistakes...
'cause in life there's only lessons to be learned.
But He still love you and me
even if to that past lesson we return.
Holy
He only loves you...

-Lil' D B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Okay, GG, another homerun out of the ballpark! This is a wonderful poem of faith and hope. But we want to ask if His loving you is enough? The question we have is how to show that you love Him? Can you love Him and love the game at the same time? If you deliberately hurt another of His creations, can you dismiss that as a "mistake" or a "lesson learned" and simply move on? Or does He require more of you?

Why I Can't Forgive This Man

This man took my lil' sister from me forever!
He beat my lil' sister to death!
I will never forgive him for that.
She was only two years old. E
ven if the drugs made him do it,
I really don't care at all about what made him do.
Rest In Peace Jamilah B.

-Lil' Joe, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Like we said, some things are unforgivable. However, that doesn't mean you should take vengeance into your own hands were he ever to be released. We know Jamilah looking down on you from heaven, wants you to be and stay free, living a good life and honoring her memory with good deeds.

Too Many Walls

Walls around me, walls surround me
Walls enclose me in
Through they hold me, they can't hold me.
I am free within
For far beyond the mountain tops
Higher than the cries
My soul soars on spirit wings
Free though locked within
There where no one sees me
There just I with me
I can be what I can't be
Where I am not free
There embraced within the arms of the one that love me
The one who takes me as I am
Not for what I should
So I sit where I am seen by those who can't see
Happy and content to seem to be and not be seen

-Cash Money GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It seems that what you're saying is that if people could see inside your mind and soul, they would see that you are free (instead of seeing only where your body is now encased). If this is correct, then we congratulate you for knowing where true freedom resides! Now, if you can only align your inner life with your outer life, both your body and soul can be free!

Thank God My Crazy Ass Got Locked Up

Shhh, before I got locked up I was staying at Larkin, running around the Tenderloin and Mission. Moms had kicked me out and I couldn't even go back to get a change of clothes. A whole bunch a ninjas was trying to get at me to make some dinero for 'em. But I ain't the kind of female that gets down like that.

I tried to get into a group home, but no one would accept me 'cause I wasn't on probation. So for a while me and my boy thought of things to get me locked up. But when I did 'em, the police always ended up taking me to CPS. I accidentally got arrested one day completely by accident, but I thank God e'ry day that I'm up in here 'cause now I'm going to have a place to stay after I leave here. Thank God my crazy ass got locked up!

-Maya GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It's really sad when one has to get locked up just to have a place to stay. There should be a place where teens can go whenever they need sanctuary, a place to be safe. Do you know, yet, where you will be going after you leave here? Do you have any plans to address the kinds of problems you have brought home with you that caused your mom to kick you out and not let you return? What can you do to mend that relationship?

Never Want To Come Back

When I get out, I am going to go to school and get good grades. I hope I don't have to come back here. I am going to try my hardest not to do anything that will get me back in here, and I don't want to go to the new juvenile. I'ma get my money right, see a couple of my girls, and hang with my homies. I'ma see my family, hang with my cousins, and have as much fun as I can, because you only get one life. I'ma get me a real meal instead of this nasty and fake juvenile food.

I'm tired of people telling me what to do, like telling me when to use the bathroom, when I can take a shower, when I can eat, and I'm tired of wearing other people's clothes. I'm tired of being locked up behind doors. I just want to eat when I want to, I want to sleep in my own bed, and be on my computer at home, and watch TV when I feel like it, and go to sleep and go in my room whenever I want to.

I just want to be with my family and my girls, because I know they miss me. I just went to eat some real food whenever I want to, and be with my friends and just have fun and not even think about juvenile, because I don't want to come back to juvenile.

-Quis B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You express what you hate about being here very well, Quis. Every one the things you wish you didn't have to put up with — from wearing the next boy's shorts to having to answer to a bunch of strangers telling you what to do — is something that would convince us to stop doing the things that put us in that situation. It sounds like you have come to the same conclusion, and for that we applaud you!

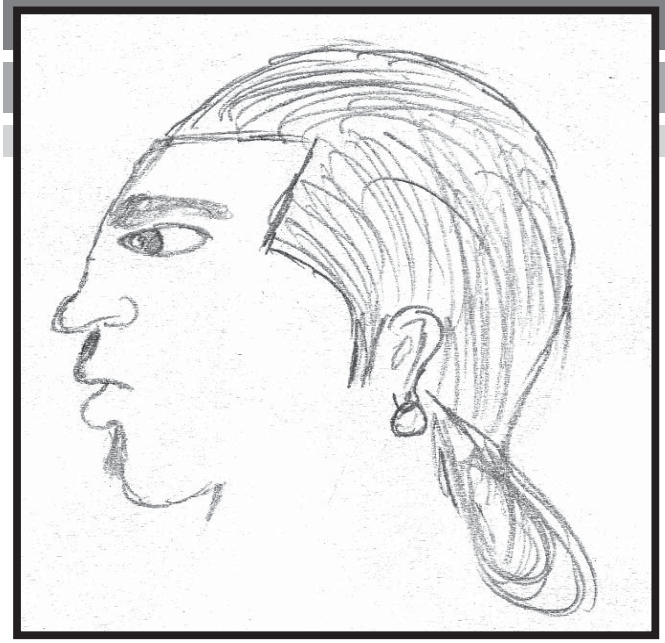
PIECES OF THE WEEK

Lament

i want to go home
i been here too long
my life right now
is like a sad sad song

-Aleshia, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What a beautiful, simple, sad, sad song. Stay strong.



Tears

tears for the crimes that we did
tears for the moms without kids
tears for all deceased
we shed tears, may they all rest in peace
everyday someone cries for a reason
it can be sunny or snow in any season
it don't matter 'cause tears don't see no race
all they see is the pain that's rollin' down the face
it's an impossible task to stop them, it's just too hard
holdin' them back, puttin' up my guard
and you know everyone cries
so if you say you don't, stop the lies
a lost life is a gain of pain
moms sayin' she's the one to blame
the tears roll down and begin to stain
all the tears are enough to fill a water drain
drip drop they keep on pourin'
for the deceased who're no longer snorin'
they sleep peacefully, quiet forever
shed them tears, naw they never
that's how i feel right now, like i'm dead
no tears flowing freely, i'm numb in the head
i can't be sad 'cause that's my emotions i wake up
it's not like a girl, holdin' them back to save their make up
the tears won't come out no more, they're frozen
i guess it's 'cause of the life i've chosen
(the one and only, never be duplicated, always hated:)

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: In a place like this, there's always hate. The better you do, the more someone hates. It's like they can't stand the sight of their own face, so they try to lose themselves in hate. But anyway, don't let that distract you from the journey you're on, 'cause you'll need all your composure to keep yourself strong. You're not in an easy situation at all, but you know that. That's what breaks your heart till the tears start — or don't anymore, 'cause you're too scared to feel the grief that you've stored. And a real cry is sure to shake you to your core, even if you come out the other side feeling a little better than before, cleansed somehow, emptied of the weight of all that pain, which maybe grows a little smaller but never seems to go away. (We guarantee it will someday, if you continue on the road you're now choosing to take.) And the pain of not crying grows hard as ice that sits stone-hard in the core of your heart. Still, anger feels so much better than the fear of despair so deep you're not sure you could come back from there. You can, you will, you do everyday. Maybe next time you pray, you might choose to say a few words to those who've passed away — it's not quite like crying but it's better than silence, and it would be a blessing beyond measure to feel some relief from the grief you feel for those who died. So close your dry or tear-filled eyes and send your love on high, carried on angels wings beyond the farthest reach of sky. You might even get a reply in your quietest times or maybe in a dream you'll see them crying for you and telling you that they're all coo' and they're rooting for you to come through here on earth and prove your worth to your family and your world, too.

and you know everyone cries
so if you say you don't, stop the lies
a lost life is a gain of pain

To the Fam'

moved to the country to live the american dream
only to suffer through low self-esteem
it was hard, they had to struggle
sometimes livin' in rubble
but one thing they didn't do was give up hope
to get to the castle, they had to pass the moat
had some rainy days, also had sunshine
never thought their baby boy would be doing some time
they did all this to better our lives
they was always honest, while all i told was lies
it kills me inside to see my folks cry
always askin' the simple question — why
all they wanted was me to have what they did not
if i really needed something it was bought
gave me way more than material things
at times i couldn't sleep, my momma would sing
when i would cry, they would wipe away the tears
always put to rest my fears
when i was sick, they was at my side
their love for me was so wide
i feel like i let them down so much
all the pain i caused was more than a touch
i can't imagine life without any of you
i would be so cold and lonely and blue
i let all of you down and i apologize
but the way i feel you can never realize
i hurt for you — mom, dad, sisters, brothers
i took for granted that i had a bed and some covers
always the rebel, the baby of the bunch
moms never let me go without eating some lunch
my brother would take care of me when he had no time
but still he never complained or whined
i promise i will make you all proud
so i can never hear them cries out loud

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This poem is so full of love and grief and remorse, but most of all — love! We know more than a few pages will be stained with tears, and that's just from readers locked up in here. When you family members read this, they'll know how much they're loved and missed. Keep that promise at the end tattooed to your heart, 'cause you will get out and have a chance at a new start — but it's so easy to forget all your best intentions when you're back out in the free world with more temptations than we can could mention. Draw a clear line and start way far back behind where you were when you lost your freedom. You might, for example, swear of drugs and alcohol for a minimum of a year, so your mind will stay clear as you put your life back together. One thing we're sure of, your family has the medicine you need for your cure — love! Don't let the bitterness of the experience of incarceration turn you away from the changes you promise your family you're making — 'cause it doesn't just start after your release: It starts right now and renew with each heartbeat. Oh, and did we say: Great poem! Great piece!

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Why I Can't Forgive One Man

There are so many reasons on why I can't forgive this man. I was hurt most of my life. So was my mother and brother. When I was little I would have to sit and watch this man beat my mother, throw her down the stairs, and crazy things like that. That still comes to my mind now. I don't know why he would choose to put us through that? What did we ever do to be put in that situation?

I can't forgive him because he raped me for three years. That is the worst thing that someone can do to little children. I can't forgive him for that because I feel that a piece of my life was taken from me. Yes, forgiveness is a good thing to do, but right now three years later, I can't find it in my heart to forgive him yet.

My brother lost his dad and I feel that it's my fault, because I told my mother what he was doing to me. At the same time I am very happy because my brother is safe. I don't know if my brother has forgiven me for taking his dad away, but I hope he finds it in his heart to forgive me — and understand I did it for his safety and because I love him.

-Maile, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: We are so sorry that you had to endure the worst betrayal an adult can do to a child, as well as the indirect abuse of watching your mother being beaten. We don't want to make excuses for your brother's father, and we don't know if we could forgive him for what he did so we can't advise you to do the same. But at the same time, we do wonder about his own upbringing and what he had to endure as a child. It's our belief that these early experiences with violence and abuse set children up to repeat the same patterns in their own families. In other words, even if you can't bring yourself to forgive him, it may be wroth trying to understand the forces that made him act that way (just as you are learning about what forces shaped you and led you down a self-destructive path for a while.) And we believe your brother, as he reaches his own sense of adult responsibility, will understand what you did and why you did it, and will forgive you — though we don't think you need to be forgiven for anything.

Letter To Inmate

I wish all of you guys could redeem yourself, even though you guys are spending life. I want to thank you guys for writing in The Beat Without because I have been inspired to change my life. Even though you can't do much to redeem yourself, I just want you guys to know that I've been reached.

Once I get out, I'm going to go to college and start my own business. I want to have a good life and not spend my life in prison. So peace out OGs. Thank ya again.

-Lifer B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: To be completely honest, JT, this simple letter brought tears to our eyes — not just for your sake, but also for theirs. We know that anyone reading this piece in the deep, dark dungeons from which our BWO writers reach out to all of you will also be moved to tears by your gratitude, and by the fact that they have succeeded in changing your life! Don't forget what you've written here. Keep the promises you make in this wonderful letter, and you will give meaning to the lives of many, many people, including your own!

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Letter To A Lifer

I don't know how you do it in there when y'all know y'all got life. I give y'all props 'cause if I had life, I don't know why, but I wouldn't want to live no more. That's just me. I need to see my family every day and my girl. And for the ones who have kids, I know that really hurt y'all 'cause y'all can't see them grow up, play catch with your sons or talk to your little girls about boys. That will hurt me so much so I know its hurting y'all.

I only been locked up for seven months, and it feel like years. But I don't now really know how it feel to be locked up for years and years, and I ain't trying to know.

But to the people that's doing life or on death row, keep y'all head above the floo' and try to see if y'all can get out on parole. It wouldn't hurt to try. Y'all probably already tried, but try again and again.

I don't know how it really is up there and I don't know if it's that easy to do that, but I hope it is 'cause I would not wish life on my worst enemy. But I respect y'all a whole lot 'cause if I was one of y'all I wouldn't be able to do it.

All right then, y'all, be safe in there and keep y'all head up!

-Berty B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We want to give you props for taking this topic seriously and writing a heartfelt letter. And even though we understand when you say that you wouldn't want to live at all if you were in their situation, it's amazing how quickly that point of view gets changed when you're facing that reality. Do you see your family and girl every day here? Of course not, but you write that you couldn't do life because you need to see them every day. You see how you've adapted to the realities of this life? That's almost always the case for people condemned to spend the rest of their lives in prison. We're not saying you'd change, but we are saying that we've known many, many people doing life or death who say they thought the same as you... until they got there.

Down

let's get drunk
you can drive us to the harbor
wish upon a star
but do you know what stars are
balls of fire
burning up the black space
falling from the landscape
exploding in the face
of god
let's get crazy
talk about our big plans
places that your goin'
places that i've never been
build my walls up
concrete castle
keep this kingdom
free of hassle
i hear sound echo in emptiness
all around
but you can't change this loneliness
look what you've found
i've fallen down
taste the saline
running down your cheekbone
tell me that you're alone
tell me on the telephone
feel your heart break in your chest now
try to get some rest now
rest won't come for a wild child

-P, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your lyrical power rises like a tower over the plains of the mundane, but don't let such intensity lead you into the immensity of life's hardest density — so much harder than the eggshell wall buffering your brain against that final fall. It's not a question of building walls but of standing tall and walking like vulnerable soft tissue through it all without refusing life's higher call — keep an open mind and calm a hurting hurt, put the rebel behind you now, press restart that wisdom might find you now.

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

My Son's Eyes

My son's eyes are what keep me motivated. I am incarcerated right now, and my son is all alone with my mother. My eyes are filled with pain because I cannot see my baby boy and I have not seen him in twenty-three plus days. The only way I am able to stay in contact with my son and my mother is through writing. Writing influences me because I miss my mother and son so much.

The last day I saw my son his eyes were so beautiful. My son will be nine months on November 7, 2006. My son's mother is in the country of Burma near Thailand. She will not be coming back to our country for another six months.

If I could have a notebook I could be able to write to my mother and my baby's mother when I find out their addresses.

I have to go to Camp Sweeney and I am gong to miss my son and won't be able to see him until I get out of camp. So I would call myself depressed. I miss and love my mother and my son with all of my heart until the end.

Love, your daddy. JB

-Jb, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Burma? This kind of story is the sort of thing that could be the beginning of a movie. We're dying to know more about it, and more about how you are going to bring the family together. You have a tough road ahead, but now is the time to get your act together for you and your baby boy!

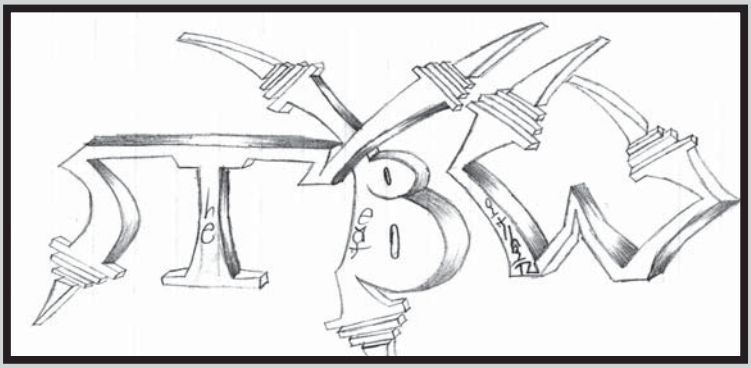
To a Lifer: Stay Stress-Free

I want to tell them to stay stress free, but I know it's going to be hard for them. Still, all they can do is live their life and educate themselves. Like for example, Tookie Williams made his life a positive one! He turned his life around for his family and for little kids.

So if you have a life sentence, just think about your family. If you can do that, it will change your life! Because if you have a baby girl or baby boy, you will have a reason to stay positive. So all I got to say is — turn your life around and accept God in your life. That's all I got to say. So peace out, Beat. This is your boy, Lil' Sam. God Bless everybody.

-Lil' Sam, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Man, who would've thought that a youngster in the Hall would have anything to teach a life in the pen' — but what you say is indeed a road to salvation. To live your life for others, is the way to recover your sanity and your humanity, whether it's for family or little kids you never met — living for others is the best medicine you can get.



It's Life

my heart pumps a mile a minute
this war that's going on, i got to be in it
deaths by the dozens
family killing their own cousins
at the funeral, the guilty was there
shedding tears, but he really don't care
it's a screwed up life that we got to live
known for taking more than we give
and it don't matter where you at
crimes are just another fact
some just get hurt by it more like a thumb tack
and someone ends up broke while another gots a rack
it's reality, nothing we can do
start a movement, okay — us and who
we're minorities so no one seems to listen
money talks and white folks glisten
somehow we got to rise and overcome
we got to knock down barriers instead of trying to run
if we're not the solution then we're the problem
but we got the strength to solve 'em
for right now though i take it one day at a time
it's life, so i can't complain or whine

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Being part of the problem or part of the solution, is a one-day-at-a-time philosophy each one of us is choosing everyday in every which way we're doing — adding to the pollution or inching toward a solution. As for the movement, it's not an easy thing to just start doin' and make an impact, but it's been done in the past and that's a fact. In India, a nation in rags united to claim its independence with non-violent resistance to the wealthiest and most powerful imperial army on earth at the time. MLK and Cesar Chavez both united minorities against a moneyed and powerful white majority. Then there was brown power in LA when they walked out of the schools to have their say about college admissions, a right to equal education and keeping the bathrooms open during lunch instead of locked doors keeping them waiting. The powers that be, are gratified to see a gangster mentality controlling inner-city youth, 'cause then "everyone" agrees with them that the just thing to do is lock 'em up and throw away the key — and nothing gets better except the profits of the prison industry.

The Sunshine of My Life

Oakland is like a war zone. At times people be beefing all the time for no reason, 'cause they disrespected their spot or their squad or something.

That's stupid, people should just be about their money, or getting an education if you young. I had to learn the hard way through life cause my parents were not there. So I went on my own and didn't listen to my grandma. Then I got to act like the other people -- like smoking grape (weed), drinkin', poppin' pills, and shootin' guns and robbery

That's a stupid path, but I had to do it how I was raised in the streets.

But now I see what my grandma was talking about, since I been going to jail.

My cousin got killed--his name was Paco. That's why I stopped doing all them things. But these things need to stop for real before the world end of the men.

No men, no babies, and then what's everyone gonna do? But this city is a war zone, and I don't want my niece getting killed.

Her name is Keymani. She is three and she is the sunshine of my life, 'cause I take care of her, since her daddy in jail. But now I need to get out and do right and show her a good example in life.

But the way I'm doing now, she looking at me, thinkin' it's good to do and it's not. That's why when I get out am I going to do what I'm supposed to do and go get an education. So she I can get her out the hood, I love to my lil' niece. I love you Keymani.

-Bandit, 150 Crew

From The Beat: They say that love can change the world, and reading a piece like this makes us believe it could be true. If you change, for Keymani, you'll also be changing for the best in yourself, and for your vision of how people could be so no one has to grow up in a War Zone. You were raised in the streets, yes, but you were also raised in the home of your grandma, who loves you and wants to see you succeed. Be sure to get help and support from a program (Omega Boys Club, The Mentoring Center) when you get out, so you can have help finding a job. OK?

The Lent

My story of how I lent my friends something that was returned broken.

My friends Chase and Chaz were invited to a trip to the sand dunes along with my father and I.

Usually my dad didn't let anyone come along, but this time he mad an exception. He had one rule only, "if you ride it, you have to be able to pay for it." So when we get there, we unload the ATV's and set up camp.

After that, Chase, Chaz and I went out riding, but before we did, I explained to them, you break it you pay for it. So we're riding along and I'm up ahead and I look back and Chase and Chaz aren't there. I come to find out that Chase flipped the ATV.

The next day, we're doing the same thing, riding along and Chaz cuts off Chase and the ATV dies. Chase, going about 50 mph starts going 0 mph as he hits Chaz. To make a long story short, they both wrecked the ATV's and never paid for the damages. But the message is, don't lend out expensive things to people who won't take care of it.

-Tyler, SEF Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Excellent on topic story! We written! So Tyler, we think you learned a valuable lesson. So did your dad demand that they pay for the ATVs? Are you all still friends?

It Could Be Any One Of Us

This week I ain't gonna write much 'cause y'all just announced a topic: "What would you write to a prisoner doin' life?" I know I'ma get into the topic, so I'ma start on that so y'all can get it next week. And this topic should be an assignment to everybody 'cause even though some of y'all sayin', "I ain't tryin' to write no prisoner," yo' ass could be the one in prison serving life .

I ain't tryin' to hate on nobody, but everybody in these weenie-ass juvenile halls got the chance to end up in prison. People carryin' guns and shhh, y'all could just as easily get caught for a murder and do 25-life. Really ain't no joke, and like some counselor in Omega said a few weeks ago, "You doin' what you doin' 'cause you don't think you gonna be tha one to die!" It's true as hell 'cause if we really thought that we was gonna die today, or after pullin' some bullshhh, or if we knew that we was gonna die if we walked through a certain alley that night, we wouldn't walk through that alley. We think we invincible, but if you and your partner are together and one of you is gonna die, both of y'all gonna think it's the other one.

-Meen B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: The message in this piece couldn't be clearer: we cannot avoid the consequences of our actions simply by believing we are immune. We can't smoke all our lives and avoid lung disease simply by saying it's not going to happen to us. We can't have unprotected sex with an infected partner simply because we like to without facing the possibility of getting HIV or other STDs. In short, wake up before it's too late! The message is clear, but the messenger has been shipped off to the Y, so we can only hope that he will write us from there so that we can continue to get the benefit of his expanding mind and his thoughtful advice. Keep your head up, Meen. You will be missed in the workshops!

My Emotions Usually Overcome My Brain

When it comes to choosing between using my brain or emotions, well, for me, my emotions usually overcome my brain. It depends on what my situation is like--if I got a choice to do something that if I do it, it would do something good for another person. My brain would tell me what I want to do, but my heart would tell me what is right, regardless of what I wanted.

So not to be full of it, but I got a pretty good heart, so I'm a follow my heart. But other times you need to follow your brain, like, for example, you're in love with your boyfriend, but he was a bad guy and cheats, things like that. You need to follow your brain, 'cause your heart will tell you to stay, but your brain will say, no, do the right thing.

-Snow Bunny, Marin

From The Beat: Excellent on topic piece! Sometimes, once someone burns you emotionally, it trains your brain to learn to protect your heart. But isn't it sad that anybody, including you, has to suffer that pain in order to learn that not everybody can be trusted? You end up wiser but when your heart is hurt it can start to wither, so it's probably best to protect your heart, even when you're eager for romance and adventure. It's good to hear the confidence you have in yourself.

I'm A Good Person

I'm so mad because I'm here. Nobody in this world can tell me I'm not a good person. I know I'm a good person. I just made a mistake. I have so many cousins in jail for so long, and when I came here I cried and cried 'cause I know I 'posed to be the difference of all my big cousins. I 'posed to be the one who go to school, get a job, do all what's right for me, and I do it. I go to school, and this was the last place I wanted to be.

I know my mother so mad 'cause she raised me to be good and taught me too well. Now I'm somewhere I know she don't want me to be. I also have older sisters that give me great guidance and I just want to let my sisters and my lovely mother know that I love them more than anybody in this whole wide world, and that when I get out, I will change — and not just for them, but for my lil' nephews and nieces. Here in jail is not where I every want to see them.

Change why you young. I also have a boyfriend that tell me right, and I also love him so much for always being there. But I will change I will be the difference.

-Regina GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You have already taken one step ahead of a lot of people to be different, and that is by being responsible for your mistakes and admitting to them. We can tell that you are a good person through your words, because every word you wrote came straight out of your heart. You know what mistake you made to bring you here, so you know what mistake to avoid making in order to stay out of here and be the person your mother raised you to be and the role model you want to be for your little nephews and nieces.

Dear Lifer/ Death Row Inmate,

How are you able to stay calm and not take your anger on someone? What do you do inside your cell? Do they give you any books or anything to do? So far, how many years have you been in jail? What was your emotions when they told you that you have a life or death sentence?

If they changed how long you had in jail and let you out the next day, would you change? Do you think in the future you would go back to jail? Well, my advice to you is to stay strong and to watch who you hang with.

-Kiera GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Thanks for taking this topic seriously, and giving this letter some thought. We think that if a lifer or death-sentenced prisoner received a letter like this, it would be of some comfort. Would you want any advice from that person, Kierre?

don't lend out expensive things to people who won't take care of it.

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Dear Death Row Inmate

I know you going through a lot. I mean, if it was me, I wouldn't be able to take that. I really feel sorry for you doing life in prison or facing the death penalty.

If I can change the law, then it would be the death penalty, because if killing someone is illegal, then the death penalty shouldn't be legal. So my advice is: think about good thoughts and try to be happy. For those facing the death chamber, try not to think about death. Most of all, for all of you locked up, don't try escaping, because you won't get nowhere far. You will get caught sooner or later, so if I were you, just think about good thoughts. Think again.

If I had a magic wand or something, I would give everyone a second chance. No matter if you're a killer or whatever, as long as you change, you deserve a second chance. So good luck and hope everything will go well for you. Sincerely,

-Ramon B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is a very nice letter to a death row inmate. We're not sure about your advice about not trying to escape. We agree it doesn't make sense to try when you're in prison but have an exit date. But when you're facing the death penalty, why not try to leave? Of course, no one has ever escaped from California's death row — except when a judge reverses the sentence or in a pine box...

Life Or Death Sentences

Your life means a lot... until it's lost or taken from you
Incarceration is hell... especially when looking at hard times to get through
In a situation like that... all you can do is strive and survive
So hard to get out of a system... that's meant to keep you barley alive
Much is missed and thought about... constantly during times
Wishes of clockwork reversing... and not committing them crimes
But to them lifers and deathers... at the ever-growing penitentiaries
Take it day by day, week by week... and keep hope alive throughout this century

-Vago B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We really like this simple but heartfelt poem, Vago. Since "wishes of clockwork reversing" can never be more than wishes, where do those thoughts about "not committing them crimes" take you in the future? How do you keep hope alive for yourself?

Would I Would?

Would that I had been
That which I am not,
Then I would not have to be,
That I which I am
Would that I had known,
That which I knew not
Then I would not have to know
That which I now know.
Would that I had never,
Loved you as no other,
Would that I had never.
And should that I could
Turn the presence back,
Would I would to change my past
Would I then yet be I?

-Shelly M GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Your poems always stimulate us to think about your words and what they mean. It's true that if you were not you, you would be different... But who knows if you would like that different person? All these "would that" phrases deal with past deeds. What we're more interested is the future tense of deeds still yet to do.

You Say You Want To Help Us

Fighting not to be another statistic, in this life of pain, struggle and money ain't shhh easy for a juvenile tryin' to fight to see another day or a day out of these gates there's nobody on our side, holdin' our hand, guidin' us down the right path they say they want to help us but I don't think it's helpin' us none by buildin' almost a half billion dollars in baby prisons, and they tell us it's all goodie goodie but yet loved ones and friend gettin' shot every other day and it takes the ambulance 15 to 20 minutes to come to there, and they must be seein' somethin' we ain't seein', cause all I'm seein' is more jails and more police and more money goin' in their pockets.

How about some programs teachin' us how to get a job, I mean it's some out there but we ain't 'bout to go to Hayward or San Leandro. Put some in the hood, help us, lend a hand, or is that just too hard. Is y'all scared that we will be successful and one of the world's major businesses will be closed (jail)?

This ain't the life we want to live, it was just the only one we were about to get close to I want to see the light but for some reason you're hidin' it from me.

Yeah you say you want to help us.

I hear you talkin' but I don't understand you.

-Lil' Naud, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Again, this passionate and thoughtful piece is the kind of thing we wish the city and nation leaders could read, so they could feel what the streets are like from an eyes-wide-open young detainee's point of view. Your anger and frustration are plain to see – and we wish we had the power to change the conditions on the streets. But really, the only people who can make a difference are people like you. In twenty years, for example, YOU could be one of Oakland's leaders, working to change the city. Or you could be a counselor, helping young people make better choices, or you could be a local business owner, hiring Oakland youth to work in your store. The possibilities are endless. You've addressed the problem, and it's time to sit and think about how you can be the solution. You have to serve time now, which means that you have the time to think: How can you use your gifts to make your world a better place?

My Future

when i get out
i want to make a change
i want to help people
not make the same mistakes as me
like hittin' house licks
and doing robberies
i am going to make a group home
called S A Y —
saving all youngsta's

-Lil' Eli, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That's a great goal, but first you have to save yourself before you can make a home for other youngstas who need advice from someone who cares and knows how to set a goal and stick to it till the change fully takes hold.

If I can change the law, then it would be the death penalty, because if killing someone is illegal, then the death penalty shouldn't be legal.

Just Something I Thought About

life is like a game so choose the right moves
get off the block and send your ass to school
make it for your loved ones, your family, and especially yourself
and stop trying to act hard and act like something else
life ain't long but you got to think about it
go to school hit the books and be smart about it
ninjas is dying left and right in the 'hood
because of lil' scandalous ninjas up to no good
everyday you seeing r i p on a white tee
(hold on a minute r i p to lil' mezzy
now back to the poem and things i got to say)
you should live your life to the fullest, like it's the last day
do you best in life and strive for success
and stop terrorizing your city and making it a mess

-Lil' Larry, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You're spitting truth that bullet proof even if people are not, but that's why you've got to stay off the spot and away from the block in a school building or working a part-time job if you're ready, able and willing, till you hit that college campus with a high school diploma in your hands as proof that you not only understand the truth but you're living it, too — 'cause that's living life to the fullest, not getting high posted on the spot like a target for sprayed bullets.

RIP Cell: Days Without You

It's like something is missin', something that I want so bad to be back in my life, days go by but still this pain has yet subsided but I'm findin' a way to get through this.

My mom told me that when I was little, I was at your grandmother's house and I broke my tooth on an end table. I never knew that ... but yeah, it ain't the same without you bra, but I just hope that the place your at is more easier.

Damn bra, hard to believe to this day. It's hard, bra and don't nobody understand what I'm going through these days but I know you're somewhere out there, helpin' me, guidin' me, through the right state of mind, but yet yours 'not makin' it that easy.

There's still some obstacles that you're puttin' out before me. I got to stand up on my own two feet and I will overcome this pain and misunderstanding and I must say thank you to The Beat Within. Dave, Sheerly, Trish and Zoe. Special shoutouts to y'all.

RIP Cell always missed and loved, never forgotten. Sunrise 6-19 87 Sunset 2-16-06.

-Lil' Naud, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You're so right, no one knows the pain you feel for the loss of your friend Cell. You've done an outstanding job writing your thoughts down on paper. Over these past months you have done a priceless job in your own attempts in trying to figure out the pain, the loss of Cell. We will be waiting for your first Beat Without essay from the Y, as it is our bet you will allow us to join you in the obstacles that wait for you. Best of luck!

don't nobody understand what I'm going through these days but I know you're somewhere out there, helpin' me, guidin' me, through the right state of mind, but yet yours 'not makin' it that easy

Brain is Heart

When it comes to using my mind versus reacting out of emotions, I usually react with my heart — because sometimes my emotions get the best of me.

One example of my reacting out of emotion is when I start to get a strong emotion that I think I can't handle, I'm quick to fire up some grapes and blow it away — even though I know I'm going to have to deal with it later. But I never thought about the consequences of this reaction until I got caught up being high on Home Supe'.

Yet there are other times when my brain has taken over and stopped me from doing dumb things, like fighting someone over things

that are really not worth my time! In the end, no one really wins those fights. Still, I know my whole life I'm going to have to battle with my emotions, and until I learn to control them, I will always be in a constant struggle within myself.

-James, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's a pretty wise piece you've written. Part of the problem with relying on the brain to overrule impulsive emotional reactions, is that it's never completely learned — you're always still learning. For example, what began as a method of handling (controlling, sort of) you emotions, itself became a problem. The impulse to use "grapes" to calm your emotions, itself became another emotional impulse that your brain needed to learn to overcome. It's better though to find a substitute behavior that does not entail negative consequences than it is to try to just say no. What else could you do besides smoke when you feel yourself getting upset? Go for a walk? Workout? Get your mind of your troubles long enough to calm down by playing a computer game or reading a book? A lot of Beat writers have learned that just sitting down and writing out your thoughts and feelings can help give your brain the time and the power to take control. Bottom line though, you need to get your heart on the smart side, too, which is easier to do if you can learn to have fun and/or relax without having to get high.

Letter for A Lifer

This is a letter to a lifer that don't have the chance to see the outside never again. Just keep yo' head up. Stay strong. I don't know what it is like to be in the pen' or do some hard time, but I do know that I don't like being locked up.

I've been in here three times. This time I came for a gun. I really don't like guns, but man, the way it is out here, you have to have one for protection. 'Cause a lot of youngstas my age and younger are getting killed! That just ain't right.

I've seen a lot of prison footage, and I've visited San Quentin with a group home. The things I want to know are: What do you guys think about? What happened for you to get life? And: If you got a second chance, would you change and do right?

I read a couple of prison and correctional facility Beat pieces, like by J Roc, Pretty Boy and some others. I like to read them, 'cause they're real and interesting. I hope I never do anything to get life, but if I do, I am going to be strong. Seeing movies, Beats and visits is enough for me not to want to go to prison at all. So keep y'all heads up.

-Lil' Freddy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thanks for a piece that shows some real concern, about the people doing hard time and about your own understanding and desire not to be there yourself. Those are good questions you ask, and we expect you'll get a few answers in our pages. Those few sentences we cut at the end though, repping your turf and such, make us a little worried about you. 'Cause that's the mind set that has you doing too much one day. But you can go to the Y just by continually returning here and then running from placements — so think about what you're really willing to change in your life to get yourself out of harm's way.

my whole life I'm going to have to battle with my emotions, and until I learn to control them, I will always be in a constant struggle within myself.

Forgiveness

I can't forgive because it's hard to. Only person that would forgive you is God. So I don't think I could forgive. I don't like the way they treat me, and for me to forgive, they would have to do a hell of a lot because I got too much pride, and that a bad things.

Pride would get you hurt sometimes. People probably don't forgive me for some of the things I then did, but I won't forgive someone who ever killed my friend. It's hard to forgive somebody for that because you can't bring him back. He's gone forever until I see him on the other side one day.

But eventually I'll learn to forgive. It's just going to take time because I'm hurting right now, not physically but mentally.

-Gf Baby B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We agree with you that forgiving people who have injured us or our loved ones is a difficult thing to accomplish. But we also think it can be a very beneficial thing to do for the person doing the forgiving. We admire you for holding out the possibility of forgiveness later on, once some of the pain you're feeling has faded.

Where I Belong

When I was little, I used to think I will not be in jail for anything. But you know when you're in life, things happen in the world. Once you get caught in this game it's curtains for you, but only if you not a hot head. I wish I could tell you about something positive better than negative things in my life.

The reason why I need to out of here is because I belong around girls and I belong with my family, and at school. Also I belong at home where it's good food can go inside my stomach, and I need to get out of here cause I'm very homesick.

Another reason is because my girlfriend needs me at home, so we can be around each other like always, because being around dudes is not gon' do it for me.

I need to get out of here, because I got a grandmother to attend to take care of very much. I need to get out of here because I miss my lil' sister so much, and my mother. When I get released I not never come here no more, this is hella fake.

I don't know how I got myself in the system. Now it's gone' be hard to get out of here.

-D, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Some people think the hard part about the system is not getting out, but staying out. But you sound like you have so much going for you on the outs, our grandmother, your mother, your sister, your girl, the fact that you like school. All these things will make it easier for you to be true to yourself when you're released. Because like you said, this is not for you.

Is Chess

Life is chess: wrong move your opponent yell checkmate.
Mike check when I regulate on you cupcakes
Poptart, you know you soft in the middle
But your crowd got you fired up
So now you caught up like Marvin when he felt that sexual healing
So now you claiming this and banging that,
Knowin' sweet ol' moms raised you better than that,
Now you locked behind these jail bars failing to face the fact
You could have been in the league
But you try to be smooth and prove a fact.
That's like riding with no ammo but you clutching the Mack.
Never thought you'd serve life,
When you was riding in the back of the 'Lac
Bet you'd rather be at school boy
Books and backpacks
I'll holla!

-Ghost, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Sometimes it sounds like you're speaking these platinum verses to the crowd, sometimes it sounds like you're talking to yourself in the mirror. One thing we know for sure, with skills like this, if you do hit the books, you could be a star one day, in whatever job you choose!

I don't know how I got myself in the system. Now it's gone' be hard to get out of here.

Forgiveness

What it do, Beat! This Ally Bo, and I'm gon' talk to you about "Forgive". I can forgive some people and I can't forgive others. It just depends on what they do to me or to a loved one.

Sometimes it's hard for me to forgive people, if I think they did something crazy and don't deserve my forgiveness. My forgiveness is too special to just give someone a blessing they don't deserve.

-Ally-bo, 150 Crew

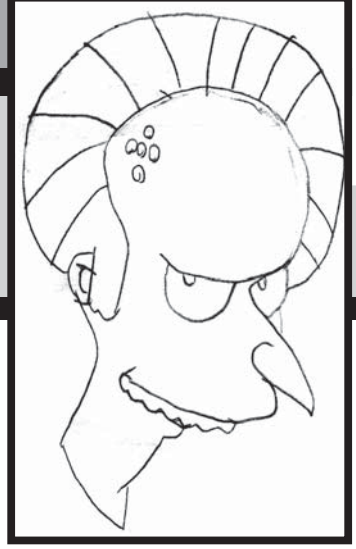
From The Beat: What you write makes eminent sense. But refusing to forgive often denies you yourself the blessing of peace of mind, and it gives that other person power over your mind and your time, as you nurse your anger. It's you who deserves better.

Dear Lifers

i feel bad for you
that you have to
spend your life in prison
especially if you're
innocent like me
i complain about these
weeks that go by
but man just stay strong
for me big brah
i will pray for you

-Lil' Lenny, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Man, we feel the deep empathy and compassion of this little poem in free verse (unrhymed, with irregular rhythms). After laying your weeks of incarceration about against "life" — your last three lines drive through the heart like a train.



Rest In Peace Lil' Mama

Lil' Mama was my ex-girlfriend that got caught up. She was in a car with a ninja that was funkin' with some other ninjas in Richmond. She was asleep in the car when some ninjas shot up the car and killed her and him out in

Richmond. She was still my potna from way back. RIP Lil' Mama.

-Lil' Joe, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What else can be said about this tragic, fatal, unnecessary, savage gunplay — and that argument of wrong place, wrong time, really only applies to the one shooting the gun who is wrong in his mind everywhere and every time.

Labyrinth

Give me the child.
In dangers untold and heart ship unnumbered.
I have fought my way to the castle beyond the Goblin City.
To take back the child you have stolen.
For my Will is stronger than yours.
And my Kingdom is great!
YOU HAVE NO POWER OVER ME!

- Robert, SEF Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: What inspired this piece? Does this piece come on the heals of examining your life, thinking about where you have been and what lies ahead as you sit with very little power, given your freedom is now in the hands of juvenile?

Here Me Out!

Man, I ain't no Menace to Society. But just because I dress in big clothes, people automatically say, "Here comes some more trouble." Why do they judge me before they get to know who I am?

Yeah, I stole and broke the law, and yes, you could call me a criminal. But don't call me a Menace to Society, because I know no one is perfect. So don't judge me, instead look at the changes I made to become a better person. And don't call me a Menace to Society!

-Jose, SEF Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Jose, Sound like you're taking responsibility for your past and changing your future. You are right, none of us are perfect, and as long as we are becoming better each day, we are an asset to society.

I write to get my thoughts out
To pour my heart out
And put my mind on the page.
I write to let my soul free.

I Write

I write
For expression
I write for healing
I write for passion
I write for family
I write for me.
Writing to express myself.

I write to get my thoughts out
To pour my heart out
And put my mind on the page.
I write to let my soul free.

- Zach, SEF Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Zach, WOW! We so get it! It is for you, and thanks for sharing it with us all. We look forward to reading more of your work in the future!

My Bike

I lent my bike to my friend, which was a bad idea. At first I lent it to him because him and his girlfriend were fighting over the phone and he only lived about two miles away, so, being a good friend, lent him my bike to go see her.

I call him two days later and asked him where my bike was, and he kept acting all shady. He hung up the phone and then I went over there. He saw me and wouldn't answer the door.

Then I find out he lent it to somebody else and I never got it back. His mom paid me for it, but lesson to self, don't lend stuff to your friends.

- Bike Lender, SEF Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Sounds like you learned a powerful lesson about friendship. Maybe he wasn't that good of a friend in return.

Listen To Your Heart

Sometimes people use their brain instead of their heart.
Sometimes people use their heart instead of their brain.
The problem is people don't always know when to use their brain
and really don't know when to use their heart.
The truth is if you think you're in love, you're not,
but if you feel it in your heart, you are.

-Skrilla, Marin

From The Beat: Nice little piece. So what about you? Do you usually lead with your heart or your brain? Or a combination of the two? Have you ever been in love? What happened when you listened to your heart?

I Lent

I lent a car system to my friend when my car had broke down. I lent him 2 "12" speakers Pioneers, an amp that was 2000 watts, 2005 Pioneer stereo.

I told him that he could borrow it until I get my car fixed, and he said, alright then. While I was getting parts for my car, he was picking me up in his car, and we were bumping all the time. Until I had got the parts for my car and I fixed it.

Then I went to go pick up the system at his house. I pulled up and he told me that the speaker had blown out along with the amp. I was so mad that I got in my car and took off, burning rubber and gotten a lot of smoke.

-Jose, SEF Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Jose, sounds like he really made you mad. We bet you'll think twice before giving something valuable to one of your friends again. We all must remember what ever we lend is in many ways like a gift, 'cause in truth it may not come back to us. Also lending something can get broken. It sucks when that happens and that's obviously what happened to you.

Brain Vs. Heart

I tend to use both, but my brain more than my heart. I use my brain because what I think sometimes is better than what I feel. My emotions are very important, too, because sometimes it's about my feelings too.

Sometimes I do think through and consider the consequences of my actions, but not all the time, because I wouldn't be here if I thought before I decide not to listen to what I was told to follow.

If I would have thought about the consequences that would follow my actions, then I would be at home in my own bed. I do sometimes react out of emotions, but that is not always the better choice when my emotions might be negative.

To conclude I sometimes think with my brain other than my heart.

-Sybreea GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Did you think about whatever you did that got you in here in the first place? Or did you act of our your emotions, Sybreea? Do you find that as you mature you start to consider the consequences more than you used to? We think that's one of the characteristics of becoming a responsible adult.

"Forgiveness" Makes Me Laugh

When I think of words that make me laugh, I think of forgiveness. There are many people I can't forgive. Sadly to say that my parents are first in my mind. Why do they deserve to be forgiven? They have scorned me for life. Most people show enough respect to even apologize, but they didn't. It is cleansing to the soul to forgive, but in my heart, they're not worthy 'cause in their heart I wasn't.

-Bam Bam, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: Even in these few lines, we can feel the pain you are carrying around with you for the way you were brought up. Parents who scorn their own children should never become parents in the first place, but that doesn't change what you had to endure growing up. Here's the thing, though. When and if you become a mother, there will be times when you do things that you regret, and you will trace the origins of your behavior back to your childhood. You may or many not be able to explain this to your children, but at least you will understand the connections. Maybe if you learned of the connections between your parents' past and your present, it would be easier to forgive them — or at least to understand where they were coming from. If you have the strength, The Beat would love to read a piece that describes how you grew up in the home of people who did not value you.

One Thang I Can't Forget Or Forgive

I thang I can't believe
You would hurt me
Invade my self-being
One thang I can't handle is you around
One thang I did was be scared being a lil' girl
One thang I refuse is to stay scared
People say it's better to forgive than forget
One thang I won't ever do is forgive what you did
One thang I won't ever do is forget
I was harmed physically and mentally
My innocence was taken away
Justice wasn't served
Can't forgive, can't forget

-Stevona GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is a terrible burden for you to have to carry around with you. We hope whoever did this to you was not a family member, because that is the biggest betrayal of them all. Sometimes things happen in our lives that we will never forget or forgive. At the same time, we urge you to move beyond this traumatic event in your life so that it doesn't eat you up from the inside. There is no need for this to affect you through the rest of our life. We can hear the anger through your words, and we understand why you are angry, but sometimes holding a grudge is harder than moving past it. It may help you to talk about this with some adult or adults that you trust. Think about it, Stevona.

The only memory I have on my big Bra is kissing him in his casket at the funeral.

No More Crimes

If they let me out, I would go home and be with my family and ride my dirt bike, play with my dog and little cousins. I would not do no more crimes and not come back here.

-Bucka Bucka B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It sounds like you have a nice life on the outs, Bucka Bucka. Why did it take coming here to realize it's not worth it? Is this your first time? If so, we sure hope it's also your last time.

My Heart Leads The Way

I usually act on the way I feel instead of thinking things over. My heart takes place of my brain in most situations. I think it's bad that I do that, because sometimes my emotions are wrong, and if I would have thought about what I was doing, things would have turned out better.

-Page, Marin

From The Beat: Maybe that's why we're all given both a heart and brain, so we can assess any situation and figure out what's best to handle it. Usually, if you're good hearted, your impulses most often won't lead you wrong, but sometimes the wisest solution is not to react at all and to just stay out of other people's business, but it's not always that easy to know what's most appropriate.

Lent Heart

I lent my heart to my girlfriend.
I gave her all my trust, my love.
And she did not feel the same way I did.
She was doing dumb things.
People told me, they were my friends.
I always give females respect,
even if they use you.
Lend you heart and someday you'll find the right girl.

-Jose, SEF Maricopa Coutny, Arizona

From The Beat: Jose, giving some one trust and love is the hardest thing to do. We're proud of you that you took the chance on love and life. Someday you will find someone that lends their heart back to you, and we're sure you will treat it with more respect.

Wanting Memories Of My Brother

It was 1994, which made me four years old, when my oldest brother Geizel was gunned down in the streets of San Francisco. I was so young at the time and it hurts me every time I talk about this. The only memory I have on my big Bra is kissing him in his casket at the funeral. I mean, I know he knew me, but I can't remember nothing 'bout him. My other older brothers put me on, but I want my own memories.

He got two younger daughters that I know for sho don't remember him, but love him to death as well as I do. It really put a deep hole in my family's heart, but we still stay strong for each other. And what I gotta say to you, big bra, is I love you and see you when I get there.

-Leandru B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It's touching that you want to fill in the details of your brother's memory even though you were really too young to remember him. We hope you can take comfort from the fact that he knew you from the moment you were born, and that he certainly loved his little brother. Now it's up to you to be the best uncle you can be to his two daughters who will be looking to you for guidance. Which means, you'd better get out of here and find a way never to come back so that they have a decent model to follow.

Loved a Pimp

My first love was with a young man, who soon after became a pimp. I met this man when I was three months pregnant.

He was so sweet. He did everything for me, like would buy me flowers and come with me to my doctor's appointments. He always told me that he was going to play the role of a father to my daughter.

When I was nine months pregnant, he disappeared for two weeks. Then, out of nowhere, he called me and told me that he'd knocked a hoe off the track and was in L.A. — come to find out the girl was pregnant: a hoe! But it's good, 'cause I'm a boss.

-Peaches, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The shock and disappointment should have begun way back when he first began to pimp. We don't understand the street value where being a pimp is supposed to be cool while his stable of workers get exploited like fools — and then they're the ones that carry the stigma of being "less than". The fall from grace began when pimping seemed like a good idea to your former boyfriend. It's not a question of who's "a boss" 'cause a pimp will always in the end get tossed.

I Can't Look Past Today

At night I cry
Asking the Maker
To take my life
I lost my dog, Sad One
Now he just a memory
A RIP
I'm so lost
I can't look past today
I've been locked up so long
I didn't even get time to spend time
With my dog

-Lil' R LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We are sorry for the loss of your friend. What next? Do you envision another way on how to live your life in honor of your friend and his family? We hope for the best in you making better choices with your own life.

Brain Vs. Heart

I act a lot on how I feel and on instinct rather than on intellect. I hardly think about the consequences of my actions, and that's why I'm up in here. For instance, if someone provokes me or it feels like they trying test me, I usually act on instinct and do something stupid.

Just some weeks ago, a female that I'm now cool with was acting crazy with me and I felt like I had to put her in her place and keep her ass in check. But what I did was dumb-ass stupid 'cause yesterday I went to trial about it and was found guilty for battery. Now that I think about that shhh, it wasn't even worth it. I would have been out a couple weeks ago if it wasn't for that. Now I've been in here for two months.

To everyone who feels like they gotta prove a point to someone, take my word for it, it ain't worth it. Lately, juvi ain't playing wit' yo' ass, they'll be quick to press charges on a ninja. Don't worry 'bout looking like a punk, because if you do it, yeah you may look hard, but you also gonna look dumb-ass stupid. Do yo' time and try to get the hell outta here.

Keep y'all heads up.

-Maya GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We think that maturity and adulthood bring the brain more into play. Children don't think about the consequences of their actions, they just act. So the fact that you now realize that what you did to "check" this girl actually hurt you more than it hurt her, and wasn't worth it. That's a sign that you're growing up. Some lessons have to be learned the hard way — but that's all right as long as they are learned!

Letter To A Lifer

To the men and women who have a life sentence of never getting out, the advice I would give is to stay strong at all times, and never be in fear or have your head down, because God will help you and make everything better.

So I advise people that's incarcerated to pick up the Bible. Accept God in your life because He's our savior and will make everything better in our life. Believe in Him 'cause God says who ask, seek, believe, have faith, and accept Him in their life, He will do. So keep yo' head up 'cause everything gone be all right. Just thank God you're living and seeing life.

-J-Pitt B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Having faith in God and reading the Bible for the wisdom it contains can definitely help people through some rough times in their lives. But what happens if you violate the Commandments, like "Honor your father and your mother..." or "You shall not murder..." or "You shall not commit adultery..." or "You shall not steal..."? Can you repeatedly break these laws from the Bible and still enjoy God's grace?

Why Can't You Forgive

It's hard to forgive, even harder to forget things that people do. They might mean or be that one big mistake that my nerve and body and tolerance cannot take. Frustrated my mind will be if I think too hard on this problem, but only if its mentally and physically bothering to my focus and concentration its gonna be some drama.

When serious I just mean what I say. Not a petty female that's written "this here," but I will get on ya chase and show you I'm real. Easy to get along with, I can talk and comprehend with you. If you don't understand you just gotta give me time.

On my revenge list, yes, you will be if you fail to see that either your words or actions have hurt me. My love comes from my heart, so I know if you intentionally hurt me. If I forgive, it may take time, but for the sake of the Lord and He saying, "Don't hold a grudge," that may be my forgiving line.

-Kendrick GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is a really interesting piece, Kendrick. Why do you think the instruction exists not to hold a grudge. Does holding a grudge do more damage to the person the grudge is held against or the person holding it?

Change My Life

when i was ten years old
i was going to school
i was doing good
then i start to robbery
then start doing drugs
for three years
and now i served a month
before going to thunder road
to change my life

-Lady Lil' E, 150 Crew

From The Beat: At least you're seeing your life clearly now, and that's the best start you could make on changing how you live your life. Take the program seriously at Thunder Road, and not your peers who want to act like they already know — 'cause they don't. It's an inside job, so keep the spotlight on you — not what those other fools choose to say and do.

Brain Vs. Heart

In the battle between mind and heart, I think with my mind most of the time, like with if I should go rob somebody or go grab some grapes from the cannabis club. But when I use my heart, that's when it comes to my family and close friends, with their decision and things they do with there lives, and help them do what they gotta do and give them advice.

But I can't understand why I can't give myself advice, and can't make good decisions for myself. I think it's because I try to help people too much but don't even be trippin' off of myself.

Well people of the Beat and people that read and write to The Beat, I need some advice on my life. Write in The Beat and I'll read it and promise to take it into consideration.

Well Beat, it's time for me to go. I'll holla at y'all next time I write to everyone that needs advice about things you go through. Just ask anyone. I bet you can find someone that can help. Don't be scared to ask. "A closed mouth don't get fed." And I'm out.

-Young Hitta B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It is interesting — but not unusual — that it's often easier to advise other people about what they should or shouldn't be doing in their lives than to know what to do in our own. It's easier to counsel people about their relationships, for example, than to keep our own relationships in good working order. Maybe it's because criticism is always difficult to accept, even when it's directed by us at us, so re-directing the path we're on is also difficult. What kind of advice are you looking for? A way out of the game? A way into school? A way to hold onto freedom? The magazine you're reading right now is filled with advice about all those topics, so we hope you read it carefully and find some of the help you're looking for. If there's anything we can do, like you say, "Don't be scared to ask."

A Scary Halloween Story, Part 2

The bell rings. Angels is so excited that she was waiting for her boy to come out from class.

"Anthony, Anthony, I'm right here!"

"What's up, baby? You're so excited today."

"I am. Guess what I heard in class today? What I heard is that our hometown got a haunted story behind all those woods."

"Spit it out, then, Angela."

"I heard that a girl named Mary Landerson died under a bridge and her ghost haunts the place."

"What? That's just a make-believe story, Angela. Anyway, aren't you too old to be believing in ghost stories?"

"Ha ha, Anthony. You're so funny. Well, baby, if you ain't scared, then let's go tomorrow night and find out are you down?"

"You know I'm always down, Angela."

"Tomorrow at ten o'clock in the night. Meet me in my house, okay?"

"Okay."

"Anthony, I love you."

"I love you too, babe. I'll see you tomorrow."

The day went by so fast. It was 9:00 at night. I heard the phone ring. It was Angela.

"Hello?"

"What s'up, Anthony? You ready?"

"You know I'm always ready. Are you ready?"

I could tell in her voice that she was scared. Angela always got scared.

"Well, you ready? Let's go!"

So we both went to the bridge and it had a sign saying, "Stay out. Private property." We found a lot of beer cans and cigarettes. I guess people been here before.

"Guess what, Anthony?"

"What?"

"I heard on the news that years ago, a girl came here with her boyfriend and they said, once they went inside the bridge, they went crazy. Her boyfriend died and now she stays in a mental house. I guess she is on medication, 'cause all she dreams about is Mary Landerson. That's sad, though."

"Yeah, yeah. Come on, Angela. The bridge down the hill."

"Okay, wait for me, Anthony."

Angela stopped. She was scared, so she was paralyzed. I was like, then, "What's wrong?"

"Oh, I'm just waiting for you."

"Yeah, right. Just admit it. You scared."

"No I'm not. Just lead the way."

So we went step by step and there it was—the bridge. It was dark inside.

"So you brought the flashlight, Angela?"

"Yeah."

"Pass it over here."

I turned on the flashlight and Angela held my hand. We took little steps and then big steps, so now we were inside the bridge. The legend goes you have to say her name three times and she comes out.

"Mary Landerson. Mary Landerson. Mary Landerson."

"What are you doing, Angela? You crazy?"

"What? You scared?"

"No, but…"

But we stayed silent. We heard noises. They started getting louder. Angela screamed so hard she dropped the flashlight.

"Calm down, Angela."

Angela picks up the flashlight and there it is—Mary Landerson.

"Why did you kill me? Why? Aaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh! Now you both will die."

"Noooooooooooo! Run, Angela, run!"

I hold her hand and we started running so fast, we didn't look back until we got to my house. Angela was crying.

"What have we done, Anthony? We just awoke a devil."

"No!"

"She's going to kill us. What are we going to do, Anthony? I'm scared."

"Get a grip of yourself, Angela. Let's cool down."

"Cool down? Did you hear what she said? She said she's going to kill us."

"I know what she said. Now listen to me. You're not going to tell no one about this incident, okay, Angela? Look at me! Okay?"

"Okay, Anthony."

"Stay here. I'll be right back."

"Where you going?"

"I'll be right back. I'm going to get you something to drink."

Angela kept crying, so I decided to let her sleep over, even though I was scared to sleep. I could still see her bloody dress and hands, scratched out face, her long hair messed up, but as long as Angela was okay, I'm okay. We both slept in my room, scared to even stand up. And then I heard steps down the in the living room.

I told Angela, "Wake up! Wake up!"

"What?"

"I heard noises down in the living room."

"Why did you kill me? Why did you kill me?"

"She couldn't have followed us. Why is she here, Anthony?"

"I don't know. Let's get out of here. Open the window, Angela."

I lock the door. Mary Landerson starts hitting it.

"I will get you!"

"Hurry up, Angela. Jump down!"

She jumps, then I jump. And I look back. Then she was in my bedroom window.

"You can't escape me. You will both dieeeeeeeeeeeee!"

So we started running and Angela slipped, but then I helped her up.

"What are we going to do, Anthony? She's not going to leave us alone. She's going to kill us."

"We need to calm down!"

"Calm down? Anthony, she's trying to kill us! Didn't you hear her?"

"I heard her, but what can we do, Angela?"

"There's got to be a way to kill her."

"I don't know what to do."

"We have to face her right now. Let's wait for her, okay?"

We waited for ten minutes and there she comes, saying, "You're both going to die!"

"We're sorry, Mary Landerson. We didn't mean to disturb you. Forgive us. We promise to never go back to the bridge if you leave us alone."

"No, you will die."

"Get out the way, Angela."

Anthony hit Landerson with a stick and they started to run home faster. So we saw a cop and we said, "Help us!"

So he stopped and he saw her and he said, "Can it be true?"

So he got out his car and he said, "Are you all right?"

"She's after us!"

"Then I know she will be back again. Stand back, kids."

So he took his gun and he shot her in the heart and she fell to the ground and she said, "Why? Why did you kill meeeeeee?"

Mary Landerson vanished in thin air and then you hear a lightening strike. Then it started raining.

"I hope you both learned your lesson!"

"We sure did. We will never play around with the dead again."

"You better learn your lesson! Go home now and get some rest."

"How you know that shooting her in the heart was going to kill her?"

"Well, Mary suffered from a broken heart. When she died, her last words were, 'Why? Why me? Why did you kill me?' She died in a violent way, but she was innocent. She didn't deserve to die. Well, go home now and never ever ever mention her name again, is that understood?"

"Yeah, we got it."

"You all need a ride home?"

"Naw, we'll walk from here."

So we went home. Angela was still shaking, but she was better, though, so we got home and I told her to go to my room and get some rest. So I want to get a glass of water. I kissed Angela in her cheek and she fell asleep. I looked outside and there she was. I got scared for a minute, but I closed my eyes and I opened them again and she was gone. I'm just glad it's over with. I went to sleep with my girl and we promised to never ever talk about what happened. Life is good to enjoy. Let's don't waste it, and never ever say that ghost stories are fake, 'cause they're real. Believe me, they're real.

-Anthony LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Great, scary drama, Anthony. Some people claim that people who have died visit them in some ways, like in a dream. Has anyone who you know when he or she was alive ever visited you in any way for real? If so, how do you account for it? The characters in your story are so real. Are any of them based on real people? What do you think happened to Mary Landerson after she tried to kill Angelo and Angela? Why does she try to kill anyone who wanders under the bridge, including innocent people who have never heard of her nor hurt her? Did she go back under the bridge? Did she ever get revenge on the men who raped and killed her? Does she still haunt and threaten anyone who tries to go beneath the bridge? Your story is so real that we, your audience, want to know!

Can't Forgive My Mother's Killer

Me, I think forgiving people is good for da soul. To forgive somebody takes time. Me personally, I can't forgive one person and that is this guy named Rico. The reason I can't forgive him is because he murdered my mother, so can't forgive him ever in life. That's just how I feel.

I know people say you can forgive people no matter what they do, but I feel I can't never forgive that man. He took away the only mother I had, and on top of that, he still gots his mother so he don't know how I feel. Most people know how it feels to lose somebody, but most people don't know how it feels to lose their mother.

So, that all I got to say. So if you still got a mother tell her you love her every day because one day she might be gone.

-G-Boy B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Yes, it would be very, very hard to forgive someone who did this to us, too, even though we believe there are people in the world who could forgive. Was Rico prosecuted for this crime? We think the advice you give at the end is the best way to deal with your own pain and is something that all of us should be reminded about. No one is guaranteed the next day, so tell those people you love how you feel today!

Dear Death Row Inmate

I can't imagine how you feel, knowing you're not getting out ever. And if you have kids, that's worse, 'cause you can't see them no more. We all know if we had life, we wouldn't do shhh to put us in jail. I know you got plenty to say to people that keep comin' in an' out of jail. Just keep ya head up and do yo' time. Don't let da time do you.

-Edward B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is a nice, upbeat letter to send to someone facing such a terrible fate. Just so you know, even death row inmates can see their kids in the visiting room. But trust us, it's not the same as seeing them at home...

Keep It Trill

Man, what's good with The Beat? This that young ninja b-gizzle aka Baby Grimey, and this letter is dedicated to the snitching-ass system that messed my life up, and to the white man that owns YGC.

Man, y'all been pimpin' me for three years. Man, all the lies y'all sayin' about me in the police reports. I'm standin' up for everybody that's in my same situation. Nothing wrong with me. I'm not special; I'm not depressed; and I'm not crazy. But let me ask you a question: How would you like it if I became a therapist for white people and made lies about your kids?

I'ma tell yo' kids that they are slightly retarded, and they got drug abuse problems, and I'ma make a phat-ass police report about how they from a bad 'hood and is a threat to society, and I think that the behavior is so bad that he should be in the system until he's 18. And when he have kids put them in the system too so y'all can see what black people go through because of y'all. Oh, and statistics say y'all kids are gonna be dead or in jail before they turn 18.

-Baby Grimey B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: No white man owns YGC. This is a public institution, which means that the taxpayers of San Francisco "own" it. Without those taxes (which we all pay, whatever our race), they would have to close this place down. We understand your frustration, and you have every right to be angry when officials lie about you. But there's more to it than simple white racism. (Otherwise, how do you explain the fact that there are more white people on death row than black people?) Your idea of turning the tables so that a black man makes similar unfair judgments about white kids may be fun to play, with but it's not practical. Here's another idea that you have more power to bring about, at least for yourself: what would happen to all these white people making all this money off all of you if, suddenly, y'all decided not to break any more laws? The entire juvenile justice system would collapse, and a lot of people would be looking for work tomorrow...

Someone I Could Love

Someone I could love, would have to have their self together. I want to go to school and listen to people who like their adult family. They can't be in jail, can't go to jail, and have to believe in God. Someone I could love would have to be truthful and independent. I need somebody to love me for who I am and to respect me for what I do. Someone who will have me making a living faithfully.

-Stella, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's a shame when our need to feel loved makes us vulnerable to being exploited by someone pretending to really love us, when all they really want is to use us to get what they want, which is usually money. If it's love they really want, then they have to treat you in a loving and positive way. You feel?

I Know

Sometimes someone makes mistakes in doing the things they did, and they didn't mean to break the law — but they sure learned their lesson during jail time.

I made a mistake in doing what I did, but I'm not bad person. I been in jail a month, and I have done a lot of thinking. It's hard for me being in here, but throughout my jail time I keep learning lot of lessons. I keep thinking a lot about how I can change myself to be more careful in what I do, 'cause that's what got me into the trouble — doing without thinking.

But once I'm out of jail, I will never come back here. I don't ever want to be here no more. I feel bad for what I did, and I know I will always learn a lot from keeping good people around me, like in here with the counselors who teach me about good ways to behave.

I'm not like the bad people out there, because I'm not the same kind of person. I'm not like them as long as I'm just being me, 'cause then I can just stay out of trouble, go to school, get good jobs, and have a good life. I plan to help out with my family. It's the only way — that's what good people have taught me, to act in good way and obey the laws.

So I'm telling you to just remember what these good people in here and on the outs have taught you about good ways and about obeying the laws. Just remember what these people tell you, no matter what you been tryin' — don't do the crime!

-Dwan, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Half the battle is making your mind up to change. It sounds like the challenge for you will be to develop good habits and stick to them, and not to follow others who invite you to join them in whatever trouble they're getting into. Just be yourself, and don't try to prove anything to anybody else. You're headed in the right direction, and that means every day takes you a little closer to your goals.

Staying Calm

When something goes down and I had a choice to either use my brain or my heart, I would use my brain because before I show my actions, I use my thoughts. This is the place and the right time to show my emotions and how I feel about what is going on.

If it is not the time and the place to show my emotions then I will control them and tell myself, "Calm down. This is not the right time. I should wait until I am by myself and then release my emotions." I do that because I do not want to flash on anybody that did not do nothing that made me mad, so I will show them respect by just holding my emotions and just waiting on a quiet place to relax and release the stress.

-Keith B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We admire you for having strategies in place to deal with situations where others might go off. Are you able to control your emotions as well on the outs as you are in here? When you release your stress, where is the quiet place you go, and what do you do there?

I'm Only Going Downhill

I wish I could be home right now, but I messed up on that hot shhh. Man, what it takes for somebody to do some other stuff in they life? Let's try something new. All we do is come back an' forth to jail. Is it worth it? No. Do you want to be in jail for the rest of you' life? I know I don't.

I'm just trying to do something different for myself and for my loved ones. I see now that I hurt a lot of people, and I am not going anywhere with my life but downhill. I just want to see a better life for myself and stay out of here.

-B-Ray B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It can be really difficult to change your life, but you're realizing that this one is bottoming out. Why do you think you realize only now that you were hurting people? Why couldn't you see that before? What alternatives do you have to your old life? We hope that finishing your schooling is at the top you're your list, because a decent education is the foundation for living a successful and free life. What can you do that will make you proud of yourself instead of wishing for something else?

Ain't No Joke

the dope game ain't no joke
especially when you in that cloud of smoke
steadily strivin'
everyday is a struggle
you out there tryin' to bubble
all of a sudden out the cuts — bam —
you tumble
like they say when it rains
it pours
so when you out there mobbin'
just remember
you live by the gun
you die by the gun
so just remember
the dope game ain't no joke

-Lil' Nicky, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Sometimes terror comes short and fast as death, like a bullet that takes someone's last breath. But it's not enough to warn a youngster of the coming storm, you've got to use all your power to remove them from harm. Otherwise they romanticize the threat and flirt with death 'till they're all wet.

I Can Forgive

I love my ex-girlfriend because she was there for me when my mom and family wasn't there — but I hate how she had me out there in the streets!

I forgive her because I see that I was hurting at a point in my life when I needed help and she was there. Now I know that she was bad, but I think I could forgive her and try to get her on my level as a friend. But, um, if she ain't willing to get herself together, it's bad.

-Stella, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We're not trying to judge anyone, but our guess is that it's best that you leave her in the past along with your moment of need and your time in the street. It's going to be hard enough to follow through with the changes you want to make yourself. You don't need to be trying to change someone else, or she might take you down with her.

My Baby's Life

As I sit in my room,
Waiting to face my doom,
I see your picture and I think of you,
Wondering what's to happen
What's to come
Staying on drugs will make me a bum,
I need to get right
Think about my kids
And not end up like my mom and dad did!

-LaRonda GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: If both of your parents were on drugs when you were coming up, then you were following models that you had no control over. This makes your behavior more understandable — but, of course, it doesn't make the consequences any easier to take. But that was you as a child, and now you are no longer a child. Your future choices are yours to make, and no one else's. Your future and that of your kids is in your hands, not anyone else's.

Pq: Say for instance when we are going to court, why is it like they are transporting animals to a zoo?

Brain Or Heart

Sometimes, I use my brain instead of my heart. One time is that when I was chillin' wit' the homies and somebody was like, "Lil' bra, let's go hit a lick." My response was, "Whatever." Now in my heart before I answered that question I knew I wasn't supposed to, knew it was wrong, but my brain had already made the bad decision.

Somebody in here told me that case common beat up sense for real. I didn't get caught, but in my heart I was already paying the consequences. To me, your brain can be your friend and your biggest enemy, but your heart will always be your key to life. So my advice now would be, go with your heart 'cause if you believe and have faith in God, your heart will not lead you astray.

-Reese-C-Cup B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It seems like your good heart is leading your good brain to think about things in a different way, a way that let's common sense triumph over immature impulse. You're showing greater and greater maturity, and we believe that if you continue to follow your own advice, things can only get better for you from this point forward.

Chained

This should make it to page one on the paper. I want to know why is it only that for us as black people when we are locked up that's when we find out who we really are.

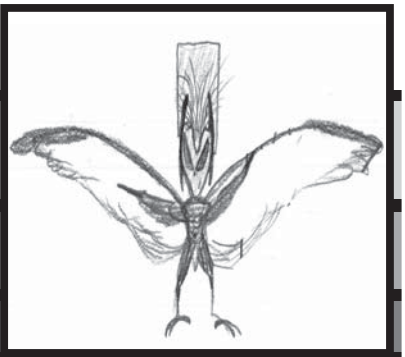
Say for instance when we are going to court, why is it like they are transporting animals to a zoo? We are chained from our feet to our hips to our hands, like we are some convicts on death row.

And another thing: Why do the police get to stop and search you based on an assumption, like I smell weed, or you match a description that ain't nothing but a reason to stop you and mess with you.

And one more thing: Why do the DA try their best to keep kids locked up? That's not right, why keep children in jail? I know that all kids are not good, but we all are not stupid, most of us have good heads on our shoulders.

-Antonio, 150 Crew

From The Beat: These are all difficult questions, and we don't have answers for you, we wish we did, because these are questions that deserve answers. And you end on the most important note of all, which is that most of the young people who are locked up DO have good heads on their shoulders. So now we have a question for you... are there smarter ways of living life that they could be choosing? Take you for instance. Could you give some examples of when you know you were using your head, and moments when you know you weren't? Because in the end, you can't control the inequity of the system, the only thing you can choose is how you decide to live your own life.



Forgiveness

What's happening, Beat. This ya boy, T, lettin' y'all know that I can forgive. In the past, I haven't been known for forgiveness but for punishment.

There have been some people in my life that hurt me badly, such as my PO. Usually I don't trip off of coming back to the Hall, but this time it got me all emotionally disturbed. The Hall isn't for me — never has been, never will be!

But something in my heart is telling me that if I don't forgive my PO for piss-testing me, I won't move on in my life. I ain't got nothing else. Peace, ninjas.

-T, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That rage can keep you locked in this cage, so that's why we're so glad you're ready to forgive and turn the page — it's the high road to freedom. And when you're out enjoying the treasures and pleasures of freedom — it will help you keep 'em. However, it's better to stay clean when you're on probation, 'cause then no piss test can condemn you to incarceration. You feel? We're just keeping it real.

Can't Forgive

What's good with The Beat. It's ya boy, Lil' Ham, from the city. But yeah, man, y'all asking why can't I forgive.

Well, I got plenty reasons I can't forgive. Me being where I'm from and with what I go through on the day-to-day life. It's like me forgiving my enemy, it's just not going to happen, because I got so much hatred for that person that I really can't say I will never ever forgive.

And the reason why, is because my mom was involved in what happened, what that person did! And I am never gon' forget that person, 'cause he made my mom go through some pain.

-Lil' Ham, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That day-to-day life of giving and getting pain maybe makes it impossible for you to even think about forgiving your enemy, but what about forgiving friends and loved ones. It's not only enemies that hurt us. We understand you're saying someone did something unforgivable to your mother, but you don't think living a life that has you going in-and-out the Hall and maybe has her worried about your life doesn't hurt her? Should she forgive you? Will you repay her forgiveness with more pain?

Back In This

Well, I haven't wrote in The Beat for about a year, because I been gone for that long. I was not planning to come back to this place, but I got caught driving a G-ride that I didn't steal.

I knew that the car was stolen, but I did not have a ride to where I wanted to go. So I called my so-called friend and asked him if he got a G-ride dat I can borrow. He said yes, and he brought the car over to my house. Then late that night I left with my god-brother, and we got pulled over and stopped.

But I didn't turn off the car, 'cause I was thinking about throwing a high speed — taking the risk of getting shot and taking the risk of dying.

But I thought about my moms, how would she feel when she heard that her only son got killed by the police! So instead I smoked a Black-and-Mild before getting arrested.

Sometimes you can't trust your so-called family 'cause they are hella scared of going to jail. But this ninja had told me that he'd rather go to jail than to see me go back. So I trusted him and believed him. But now I know not believe other people like that. But I ain't tripping, 'cause I don't got true friends in the outs. I'm by myself. I'm my own friend.

-Teddy Bear, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If the definition of a friend is someone who will keep his word when he says he'd rather do time than see you go back, then maybe you're right about not having friends out there. Maybe he started thinking about how his mother would feel if he got himself locked up for grand theft. Maybe a friend is someone who would tell you not to take the chance of getting caught in a stolen car, 'cause even if you get away with it most of the time — it only takes once to mess things up. Still, props on not pulling that high speed like too many fools do. Some do die by the police. Some hit and kill pedestrians or other drivers. For sure you were your own friend when you chose not to "high-speed" away.

Dear Lifer

My name is Carl. I'm an inmate at the Alameda County Juvenile Hall. I've been here nine times including now. I used to get mad for coming to jail when I was a little younger and I used to cry all the time. I read a lot of books though, and I learned to adapt to the situation.

I also learned there are people not much different than me who don't have a second chance. Then I start to think to myself, "Well, why am I crying and moping around when some people can never experience that feeling of being free ever again?"

I would really like to know how it is to be in jail. I mean, I don't want to know in the sense of having it happen to me! But, basically, I need a little, well — a lot of advice to help me keep it from happening to me. I'm on a four-year probation, and it's going to be hard to stay away from trouble. I mean, I can choose to stay away, but it always seems to find me anyhow! So, dear lifer, I'm looking forward to your letter of advice.

-Carl, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's natural to feel bad about being locked up in juvenile hall, away from your freedom, your family and your friends. Still, you can't just collapse into the pain and depression. You have to adapt to your situation to some extent. Of course, some people adapt too much, so that it becomes almost normal for them, like comfortably familiar. That's the first step toward becoming what they call "institutionalized" (which means better adapted to incarceration than to freedom!), and you don't want that. You got it right when you say there comes a time when even though you try to stay away from trouble it comes looking for you. To the best of your ability, if it knocks on your door, don't answer; if it calls on the phone, hang up; if you see it walking toward you on the street, cross the street, or turn around and walk the other way; etc. Now we'll leave it to one of the lifers reading your piece to offer you that sage advice from the other side of the walls where freedom lives only in your mind, heart and dreams — all of which can take shape in words on a page.

It's Time

Yeah it's about that time for young Naud to be a young man and make the right decision, I'm not goin' to be successful following the footsteps of a criminal. All I'm gonna do is fall into the trap of another statistic. Not one of my goals they might not want me to graduate from Juvenile Hall to an upstate college student – but it's not about what they want, it's about what I want.

No matter how much somebody wants to bring me down 'cause I'm that person that will shine. Started off rough, but don't trip, 'cause I will always be there for my squad for life. Cause they're the ones that helped me and taught me, and that is what made me the person that I am.

I ain't goin' out, Trust that.

-Lil' Naud, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We worry when we hear you say, on the one hand that you are ready to make that change, and then on the other hand you pledge loyalty to your "squad." So long as the rest of your crew are still doing dirt on the streets, your connection to them will hold you back, and bring you down. We're not saying to abandon them, but really, how much good can you be to your friends if you're locked up or worse? If your friends are still out there, then you may have to stay away from them for a while, find a positive peer group, and THEN once you have yourself straight, get back in touch with them and give them a hand up. We know that's a rough choice, but can you make it?

Her

What it do, Beat! This Cannibal with some heat fo' you:
walk a mile for her love
i really done hurt the ones that i love
the one that had nothing but love fo' thug
now i done messed things up
she was there from the beginning to end
even when times got thick she didn't split
'cause she was a real down chick
she wasn't the type that'a run from beef
so i can't say she wasn't a lady in the streets
but with me she was a freak
i had it good as most ninjas'a think
she was smart and into me fo' what she seen in me
and wasn't a freak
but i messed it up man because of the bud
and can't say i didn't love her
'cause on'a real man i'a die for her hugs
but i am gon' get it back 'cause it was sent from above
it was meant fo' me
that's why i cry fo' her sympathy
and i walk a mile fo' her love
'cause she had nothin' but love fo' this thug

-Cannibal, 150 Crew

From The Beat: They say you never know what you've got 'til it's gone. But it seems like everybody has to learn his own lesson. You got a two-for-one in that department! You learned how special she is if she's true to you with love to give. But you also learned that bud even when it's "free" will have you pay a high price eventually — whether it's doing time or losing someone so fine. When you get your freedom back, protect it by doing right. And when you become that do-right man, maybe your ex will change her plan for the best.

One Life to Live

I got one life to live,
I gotta make the best of it.
I gotta stop doing drugs, I can't stay lit
I gotta stay healthy, I gotta stay fit.
'Cause I'm a man ….not an addict.
I'm getting paranoid, I don't understand
Every time day and night, I'm shaking my hand,.
I smoke a blunt while listening to music, just chillin'
But the drugs won't let me stop killin'
I need some help to start the healing
To stop doing drugs, that don't take away the sadness I'm feeling.
When I do drugs the room starts spinning, it makes me dizzy.
Weed doesn't give me anything but make me fat and lazy.
But screw this world, I'm tired of livin'
When I die, I pray I don't go to hell, I pray I go to heaven.
Suicidal thoughts running through my dome.
Weed is killing my brain, my head feels like foam.
I wanna get out, I wanna go home!
I got one life to live, I gotta make the best of it!
I gotta stop doing drugs, I can't stay lit.
I gotta stay healthy. I gotta stay fit.
'Cause I'm a man…not an addict.

-Lil' Mental, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Mental means two things – it can mean "crazy" or it can mean "of the mind". In this poem you show that you have been through some crazy, but also that your mind is strong and thoughtful. You use the power of your mind (and your rhymes) to try to make sense of your life, and the troubles you've had so far. That same power will help you get through whatever the system in front of you, whatever sentence you have to serve.

My Baby

Baby I be missing you everyday
ever since I got caught up
all I do is think about me and you.
Baby do you really love me?
Baby I be thinking about changing my life around.
Baby all that what I used to do, I'm really gonna change.
Why, because I am very tired of being the same.
Baby I always say I love you
but I don't know what that means.
Baby I am saying these from the bottom of my heart.
Baby when I get out I am going to prove myself to you.
Baby I know people gonna ask me why I change
and all I am going to do is walk away and mind my own biz.
Being in here is not the spirit.
To think about it I really care about you
but when I am on the outs it don't seem like it
why I don't know.
Baby I remember when I pop pills and go bad and I really don't mean to,
it's just them pills that have me on.
But no matter I cuss you out I still love you baby
I want you to believe me,
everything I tell you.
Baby all them KB songs be having me thinking about you hella hard.
These people make me hella mad up in here but I don't be tripping over them
because all am thinking about you and you only.
Baby I love you and I am gone.

-Jamari, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If you love this girl, and we know you do, then don't let pills or anything else allow you to mistreat her. Pills are no excuse for cussing someone out and making her feel bad. What's in the past is done, but watch out for yourself and be the man you want to be. And don't let drugs send you out of control. Address this problem before it really wipes you out!

Forgive Or Not

Can I forgive the person or not? The reason I hold a grudge on this person is personal reasons. I don't want to get to details, but this person really is close to me, ever since I can remember. As a child, this person was in and out of my life. The person would give me gifts when he was around. He would also play games and make jokes.

When he was out he would be gone for days even weekends. Until I got older I found out what he was doing, and I could not believe that he was really doing it. He knew we all knew about it, but he really didn't care. He was living a double life, behind our backs.

I still don't know how to forgive him, while he is still living with us. I think I should forgive because seventeen years ago I was his seed swimming inside him.

-Nicoya B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Unfortunately, the picture you paint of a father cheating on one family while raising another is all too common! Too many men seem to think only of their own desires and their own pleasures, and not of the consequences to anyone else. We don't know if there's any "right way" to confront your father about his betrayal of trust and selfishness, but we do think there are ways to deal with him directly that could lead to forgiveness. Have you ever talked with him about those choices he made? You have the right to be heard... by him!

The Unfaithful

What up Beat? This is Derrick. Man I came back, but I'm gonna leave that alone. I have been hurt so bad I hate this person. I think forgiveness is good but I just can't. My first love broke my heart. I was in serious love with a two faced breezie. I wished my ex girlfriend would forgive me for cheating on her with the breezie above. She was the one I knew in my mind and heart but forced myself not to believe that she wasn't.

-Derrick, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Why do you hate this girl who you cheated with? The only person you have to blame is yourself. That doesn't mean you should hate yourself, but if you channel the energy you're spending hating that girl into forgiving yourself, you might not make that same mistake ever again.

To My Brothers and Sisters

Why are so many compelled to be self-conscious, the way they look, the way they're supposed to look? Thin. Low weight. Skin tight, showy clothes which disgrace one's features, and make her slutty looking.

And if I were to walk along side her, I'd be suspected as her pimp, her owner.

Questions:

Why do that to yourself?

Why diet an already gorgeous body?

Why show so much skin? I'm a man so why not, it looks good?

No!

The point is, it's easy. She's easy. I hate when my fellow brothers say they be havin' all these women. Talk about they got 'pearl.' "She do this, she do that. I'll get her out her pants," all in one sentence.

And why I ain't got so many females all on me. The question is: Why? Because it's not respectable.

In all words, it's not right. If she take her pants off to me so quick, how do you know she don't do it with the next dude? In cases, call a "boob"...

Why do that to yourselves ladies?

Men, why treat our women like that?

And please, my black beauties, my luscious Latinas, my classy caucasians, my adorable Asians and soon don't encourage towards yourselves.

-Mainy Hyena, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's a trip, how many girls think that the best they have to offer the world is their body, when their hearts and minds are the greatest gift at all. How do you think this happens? Where do girls get the idea that they need to "sex it up" to get attention? And where do the boys get the idea that it's ok to speak on girls with such disrespect? We'd love to hear your take on the roots of the problem.

This is The Real

Fo' sure, I'm gone speak the real, on how I feel.
I love my life I love my God
Sometimes I think I'm locked up in a big box and I can't get out.
Sometimes I feel like I'm taking the wrong route
My brother always try to tell me what goes around comes back around
But I don't really see the big picture into it framed
My mother always use to say don't put on the kicks if it don't fit.
But I see now what she talking about. I don't see a lot of people talkin' about the real, always feel but as I tack my steps toward God I see my life before my eyes.
Jesus walks with me but I know I have to step first.
Like I said, I'm gon' keep it real. Whoever read this please I wrote just know go the facts is when you do wrong,
Right don't come wit' it.

-Dionte, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Could it be that getting locked up put you on your good path? This poem crackles with skill and style and conviction. If you have to "step first" what kind of step do you have to take? Break it down for us.

Ride Wit' Me

Dear Lord, ride wit' me through all my times,
Make sure yo' words get through me through all these rhymes
Not the words from a mark but a prayer for gangstas
You've rode it out with me and now I must thank ya'.
Gun shots at night while cars glide past,
With the help through you my life might last.
Tires peel, blood spills, gun shots cold chills
On the block day and night, tryna live through meals.
Mills tryna make 'em, dollars we chase 'em
Don't let us lose focus
'Cause life demons take 'em
So as I close this prayer and in a real way.
A gangsta rapper concludes being thankful for today.

-Rodney The Kid, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If we had to choose between DMX's gangsta prayer and yours, we pick yours. For the skills and vivid images and heart. We love that you end on being thankful for today. If God could answer your prayer with commandments of his own, what would he tell you to do?

My mother always use to say don't put on the kicks if it don't fit

Brain Vs. Heart

This is a funny subject for me, because I kind of use both. Well, I was raised by my grandma, and she used her heart most of the time. That makes me mad sometimes, because by her using her heart — people take advantage of her!

But anyways, sometimes I do the same way she does, actually most of the time when I was young I'd use my heart. But now, with the life I live, I have to use my brain — and if I forget, my homies will remind me!

Just a couple days ago my homie got mad at my other homie and told him to stop being so kind-hearted. But if you are kind-hearted that will get you slapped in the face or even killed, so I leave my emotions out of it — and do what I got to do, even if sometimes I don't like it.

-Lil' Boxer, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Hmmm, let's see: Would we rather get slapped in the face or shot in the head? Even a hard-headed thug can't keep that bullet from splintering his skull when the shot's been fired. On the other hand, when you're kind-hearted and people disappoint you, it's usually you ego or vanity that gets slapped in the face. So what? Get over it. It ain't nothing, really — it is nothing at all. And so long as kind-hearted doesn't mean stupid, how's it gonna get you killed? It isn't. Your homies are wrong, but if you'd rather follow their advice all the way to the pen' or an early grave, no one can stop you but you!

Home Is A Memory

I know a lot of people in jail right now for murder and attempted murder. And a couple of them are close friends. Most likely they are going to do life in prison for something they did in the spur of the moment.

When I talk to them, they sound like they wish they never did what they did. Sometimes I wonder if something like that really can happen? Are they really never coming home again? But whatever happens to them, I'm always gon' keep it lit for them 'till the day in gone.

-Big Sterl, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That phrase everyone uses about "keeping it lit" for the ones gone or locked away. What's that about? You're dedicated to continuing the life style that got them killed or locked away for life? How much sense does that make? Yeah, almost everyone's sorry he did the crime for which he got caught up, but it's all those crimes leading up to it when he didn't get caught that he needs to feel sorry for, too. Or, you do — meaning, those who still have a chance to stay free on the outs, need to see that every time you "get away" with it, you're setting yourself up for when you don't — and also setting yourself up for that time when you do something out of pocket in the heat of the moment, but you're setting that moment up by "keeping it lit".

My Generation

The streets of Oakland have forced most of the youngsters to survive on crime. It's either kill or be killed, and if you were in our shoes which one will you choose?

Due to whatever reason we have, we choose to move to the streets. We have fallen into the rules of them.

It all starts at home. And as you get older and go to junior high school you run into friends that become real close, and you want to go kick it wit' them other than just kickin' it with them at school.

But your parents have a different agenda. That's when you start sneakin' out.

Then money comes into your life and you need a little more money than lunch money, but moms and pops whoever ain't tryin' to give it up so you say eff it, eff school, eff it all…

And then the streets of Oakland welcome you and all of a sudden, money runs in and out of your hands. So much shhh happens, you get cars, high speeds wit' 5-0, runnin' through hella women, smokin' hella grapes, livin' the good life, but then the thought of takin' it up a notch comes to mind, then you start postin' up all night, walkin' back and forth to the spot. Always got a thing on you.

Then you finally fall into the trap, locked up first a couple weeks then months, then placement and now you're in the same predicament as me and my brother, waitin' for that ride to CYA.

But is it really just all our fault?

Shhh, I guess so 'cause we all know right from wrong. But why do we chose to fall in the hole every time? Oh yeah, it's all we know, we got to eat Beat.

Can't pop one so why not a few? Something really just went wrong with this generation. They tryin" to give me and ma bra six but I ain't havin' that. We'll be out soon and shhh gonna change is the only thing I can say is stop as soon as you can, 'cause you don't want to be in a box.

Be safe and sleep on the floor.

-Lil Naud, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** This is another great piece, Naud, breaking down that fall from innocence, that dark path which we see so many of The Beat's writers follow. You write that "the streets forced us to survive on crime," but is that true? When you were running the streets, were you literally having to do crimes to eat? Or was it about being with your boys, and having cars etc… Could you have "survived" on the money you got from your family? Because if the answer to that is yes, then there's more to the streets than just survival, right? What is that, what makes that so appealing? Is it just about the thrill, about peer pressure, about being the one everyone envies? You have proven over and over again that you are a teacher. Now teach us some more!*

On a Sleepless Night, What Do You Do?

All these sleepless nights I think of you
The way you laugh
And all these special things you can do
At night I'm wondering if you're thinking of me while I'm thinking of you and do you often find yourself crying the way I do.
I stare at your picture and reflect on all the times we've shared and I know all along I've led you to believe I never really cared, but since day one you were always something special even the look in your eyes told you that God blessed you with the ability to control my feelings and thoughts
And now I look aback and regret my faults.
I'm locked up and I really struggle up all night
Putting my feelings on paper to show you how much I really love you
I don't do this to make the hours go by
And I damn sure wouldn't stay up all night
To tell you a lie
From the depths of my soul
I love you still and I promise on my mother I always will.
My dearest, please believe everything I say is true.
So can you tell me on a sleepless night?
What do you do?

-Lil' D, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** This poem rings with truth and feeling. Do you think that when you get out you will be able to live out its promises on a daily basis?*

Never Happy

Someone that hurt me a lot was my dad because he left me and my mom when I was about five or six years old. My dad decided to remarry and raise two kids without my knowledge. I found out from my dad one day when I went to visit him.

It took a long time to forgive him for rejecting me and my mom, but I did anyways. I hope that I will not do that to my own kids one day because I know how painful it was for me.

-J-Dav B4, SF/YGC

***From The Beat:** A lot of men think that their own instant pleasures and desires are more important than the responsibilities they have towards their children. We think that boys and men tend to be a lot more self-centered and selfish that girls, and that's why they don't think about what they owe to others. How did you get to the point where you could forgive your dad for this abandonment? Did you talk to him directly about it? What did he say? We also hope that you don't repeat his pattern with your own family relationships since you already know how painful the outcome can be.*

At Court

What it do, Beat. Ain't this just about a b?

Man I just went to court and the fake ass lawyer said he was gonna do all he can. This ninja gonna tell me about my case, and that he was dealing with another case almost like mine. He said that I was going to be lookin' at 50 years to life.

Man I swear I didn't want to hear that shhh. He said that's if I go to trial and lose. He said that he was going to try to get a good deal with the judge, but who knows, shhh happens. This ninja gon' try to set my court over, move two months later, the judge was like, an, it's about a month. Come back…I was like damn, that's still hella long. Man, I felt like runnin' out that shhh, but I'm downtown and I'll instantly get caught

They didn't have no cuffs on me at all. But I was thinkin'. I'm just sayin', for all that is out there, doing shhh, just think before you do it. Late!!!

-Mike Jonez, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** We shuddered when we read this piece. Not just because of the unimaginable stress you must be under, but because of the way you broke it down. It felt like we were in the room with you, listening to some lawyer talk casually about fifty years, and like we were sitting there in your place, looking down at uncuffed hands, getting ready to bolt. We hope that someone else, younger, reads what you are writing feels the power of what you described so well… it would be amazing if these words convinced someone to change their life around. No matter what happens, we know you'll never be a wash, because even when you are feeling despair you manage to inspire others.*

Why Can't You

why can't you just
forgive me for my past
and just release me
to my family —
forgive me for all
my wrong doings

-Lil' Lenny, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** This simple, profound and powerful little poem — is it addressed to the judge? Even Jesus when he forgave the prostitute who was about to be stoned, said to her, "Go forth and sin no more." Are you ready to do that? To stop those "wrong doings"?*

Man, What's Good

I'm in the juvenile hall and guess what my race is? Shhh, you know... I'm a Black African American male out the hood. I'm from Oakland California. To be exact I'm from a certain street in a certain part of Oakland.

It's not good getting your freedom took when you could be out in the real world. Ya, you can be in better places like with your girlfriend.

-Oakland Kid

From The Beat: You said it, but you didn't explain it. Why do you think many of the people in the hall are African American? So what's your plan for regaining your freedom?

I Miss My Girl

When I get out I don't want to see nobody but my boo. She is all I think about so that's my plan and that's what I am going to do.

This is the big homie Stuwie from Oakland. I'm out. Love to all my ninjas, I got to go to my room now so I am out.

-Stuwie

From The Beat: We hope you and your boo can work together when you get out to make sure you stay free, because you can't go to court and the judge or your lawyer or yoru PO asks you what's your plAn if we let you out, and you reply , "my boo." You need to have more info/detail than this!

Sucka Shhh

Why do I never forgive people? Because people be suckas. But when you ready to fight they all talk but when you get off they don't want to fight. That's called sucka shhh. And I hold a grudge against ninjas like that. Tell them ready to square up and stop being weak, that's on the real I'm just letting you know, but until then man up and stop being little.

-Pj

From The Beat: You're a sucka if you think getting in fights proves you are strong and brave. A truly courageous man can walk the other way from a fight to protect his dignity and freedom. So don't let yourself get caught up in this bull!

Going Home Soon

I am going home soon. When I get home I am going to take a long ass shower you feel me bra and then I am going to go see my boo and do the grown man thing, you know what I mean.

So do cool and stop hating with these ninjas and get that money, one love!

-Stuwie

From The Beat: We hope you realize that the real grown man thing is to have a plan for how you're gonna stay free.

Forgiveness

I haven't forgiven myself for putting my mom in all this stress and making her worry about me and crying about me for being in here locked up and I feel bad about it and I haven't forgiven myself.

-Jesus

From The Beat: You should feel bad. Did your mother ever tell you not to do the things that you were doing on the outs? If so, why didn't you listen to her? What are you going to do to make this up to your mother? Remember: In life, we only have one mother, so we have to cherish ours at all times while we still can.

What's On Jakari's Mind Tonight?

J: When I plan to get out.
BW: What's your plan?
J: I plan to get my money on.
BW: Are you gonna get a job or put yourself in danger?
J: A job on the block.
BW: Doesn't that put you in danger of getting hurt or arrested?
J: Not if you keep it lit and do the right thing.
BW: So how'd you end up in jail today?
J: A violation of probation.
BW: Is there anything you could have done to avoid the violation?
J: Go to school and get good grades.
BW: So when you get out are you gonna try that?
J: No, I'm gonna stay on the block and get my shine on and get my weight up.

-Jakari

From The Beat: Sounds from what you're saying that you've got a bad case of hood sickness. You are stuck in a mentality that is only hurting you. We hope you see the light (some day) and discover that the block is a trap, and if you do you can take your friends with you on the journey to freedom.

To Crackhead

I don't think you should call yourself that. There is so many other names out there that you could call yourself feel me. I stay reading your Beats but that Crackhead shhh killing me if you really smoke coke it's good, just try and shake that shhh but I don't think you smoke coke but yeah do what you do but change yo' name. How about this I'll give you

One: Lil' G Thang aka Crackhead. Yeah hope to see that for you. Take my advice stay strong.

Lil' Naud

From The Beat: Great advice. A famous poet once wrote, would a rose by another name smell so sweet? We all know that names carry power, and your advice to this person to change her name is a powerful message of hope.

In Fresno

I was in Fresno in a group home for like three or four months. I was going to Fresno High School. One of my friends had done a robbery. I was there, so I got caught up with him. We went to jail out there. I was there for months going back and forth to court trying to beat the case then they switched me out here.

I'm from Oakland. I ended up in Fresno for selling weed in Oakland. Fresno was a cool place. I liked the school, cool people. The heat I didn't. I liked it when we'd go to the park and play basketball and football. I missed my family.

I'm still fighting my case now. But I'm glad to be closer to home so my family can see me.

-Little Cb

From The Beat: We hope next time you experience a new place, it's through freedom not punishment. Sounds like you made the most of it, which shows what a strong person you are. Now you have to be a better judge of friends.

What's Goin' On

Well this is the homeboy Kazer from Oakland. I just want to let a little sample on what's going on, well I didn't see my homeboys for a while. He know who I'm talking about. It was like a blink of an eye one second we was kicking it, next moment we came to Juvy, now they split us away from each other.

Well right now I'm with him in the hall, 'cause of something stupid but my PO came and told me they said I can go back to the group home, and so I said I'll go back. But when I was over there I got in two fights with these ninjas. When I first got there they was tryin' to punk me, but I wasn't going for that so I got into it.

But right now I want you to just stay in camp and pimp it now, for me. I'm going to pimp this group home, we'll see you about eight months so see you back on the outs, and stay strong.

-Kazer

From The Beat: You give the system the chance, by violating and breaking the law, the system can tears people away from their families and their friends, splits brothers and cousins up, scatters people all over the state. But here's a question: Does the time you spend with your homeboys lift you up or bring you down to more trouble? Do you help each other study, find jobs, stay on point? If not, maybe the people that decided to separate you were trying to help you find your way!

Death In The Family

Man what up with it Beat. I'm stressing. I just had a death in the family so I ain't got much to write about.

-Rodnelle

From The Beat: We don't believe you don't have much to say, but we can believe it's too painful to write it down. Sorry for your loss. The Beat offers you much love and support.

The Plan

The plan is to make a plan, you understand. My plan is to keep out of Oakland. You feel me. It's off to Job Corps feel me with a job, and a place to sleep stay with my kin, and start a family.

See the plan is to do it big, but right, you know I'm tryin' to get this shhh right. You know I'm going to do it so I'm out of sight. You might wanna change somethin'. I'm gonna keep it real and you just gonna know. You know (you know!)

-Mainy

From The Beat: We know! Your plan sounds good, and we hope there are no haters out there trying to stand in your way and if they are in your way, walk around them!

I Miss My Brother

I remember the time my brother and I had the house to the neck with only my little sister watching and she was a baby at the time plus she was asleep in her crib so it was nothing.

So it was my mom's birthday and she went to the club with my auntie, so they was out all night.

So me and my brother bought an eighth of grapes and a bottle of Remy.

Plus, my brother called his girlfriend over and she brought her niece with her and this was my second time getting loaded.

Me and my brother smoked half the grapes before they got there, but we still smoked with them then we got drunk with them then I got the munchies and ate the whole box of cereal, then my brother and his girlfriend went in the room to do their thang so I took her niece in the room and did my thang then my stomach started hurting and I threw up all over the girl then she started screaming like somebody was shot then my brother and his girlfriend ran out the room butt ass naked.

Then she told her auntie she wanted to go right now. They left and my brother was mad. I miss brother Ed keep yo head up and never go out.

Live long and be strong they can't keep a real brotha down.

-Teric

From The Beat: A night gone bad! We all realize our limits with drugs at some point, and looks like you found yours that night. Take better care of yourself, and your little sister too. You wouldn't want her doing all that with some random stoned guy who doesn't love her when she is your age, would you? Ask for more from life – you deserve it. Now tell us, where is your brother?

I Can't Forgive

I can't forgive the fake because you gotta be real. Why should I forgive you for trying to be something you're not? That's how people get killed: For trying to prove themselves. If this life is not for you, then change while you still can 'cause you can only get so deep before you sink, so be real and not fake.

-Stank

From The Beat: Why do you feel like too many people perpetrate to be what they're not? Who determines whose is real and who is not? What is your definition of being real? You made a powerful point. A lot of people lose their life and freedom for trying to prove his/herself. Why do you think people feel like they have to prove this/herself? Did you ever try to prove yourself? Speaking about yourself, are you going to change?

Ain't No Fun

I want all y'all to know this ain't fun to be in the Hall, so get out and stay out.

-Lil' Dom

From The Beat: Thank you for sharing your feelings with us. We hope that those who are on the outs get a chance to read your piece and realize that being in jail is not the place to be. What was your impression of jail before you came? Is it the same now that you're locked up? Why or why not?

Hardest

Be the last one quiet
The first to speak
This is how it is
Don't be a coward, fearful and weak
Be the last one quiet and the first one to speak
You gotta carry a gun and never run.
Be the hardest in the city
And stay with hundreds and fifties

-Floyd

From The Beat: Well, your rhymes are tight but the thought ain't right/the man with the gun is the first on the run/from the law from a bullet from a speeding hearse/the life you praise here is nothing but cursed. Don't waste those skills on a path that kills, or follow your verse to something worse. You say don't be a coward but what does that mean? Are you brave enough to leave this scene?

What Up

What's good wit' it Beat! This ya' boy, Dell. I'm back in Alameda County. They had me at SF/ YGC, but you know I did that time. Now I'm back here doin' this time, feel me? Shout out to YGC, but yeah though, all my people locked up, stay solid and do yo' time. They was tryna rap me on time, tryna get me ten years, but I fought that. Now my max. is like three years and eight months, but yeah though, stay solid and do yo' time. Gone.

-Dell

From The Beat: Has the news of your future set in yet? You're going to be spending the next couple of years of your life behind bars! You should be out playing video games, going to the movies, etc., instead of what you're doing. We're not trying to bring your feelings down, but you need to be more serious about your life. This is time from your life that you will never be getting back. However, we hope you do something positive with the time you're going to be doing behind bars. Feed your brain so when you're back on the outs, you won't feel so out of place.

Brain Vs. Heart

Sometimes I use my heart instead of my brain because whenever someone messes with me, my heart does all the thinking because it's just telling me to smash on that person. After I'm done, my brain starts thinking about what I just done, so most of the time I follow what my heart tells me.

-Lil' Mike

From The Beat: Why does your heart think this way? We feel you should listen to your brain more. We know that in the heat of the moment, sometimes we do things without thinking. However, those incidents can have major repercussions. What are you going to do the next time someone messes with you?

Still Here

Almost two months since I've been here. Man, this shhh ain't no game. I never thought it was, but man, all this is starting to show.

Whatever you do in the dark is gone be shown in the light. Man, and that's what's going on. I need to keep it solid. When I get out, man, my bra got fifteen. Man, ninjas dropping like flies. The murder rate is going up. Man, why did I have to go on one at Camp? Why couldn't I be a good citizen and do my program? Man, but then I woke up.

-D-Nutty

From The Beat: The only person who knows the answer as to why you acted a fool at Camp is you. You're right; things are hectic out on the streets. How does this make you feel? We hope that this experience behind bars has showed you what you can look forward to if you continue to do the kind of things you know you shouldn't be doing. You already know firsthand that misbehaving is not going to bring you positive results. Behave yourself this time around so you can get out and stay out.

The Highlight of the Day

It's kinda boring in here on some days, the same routine day after day. The food. man, I'm sick of it, but I eat it cause I'm hungry. Shhh all we have to drink is water, milk, water, mail and sometimes a little carton of orange juice.

What I mainly do is read.

Before I came here I hated reading, now I'm all into it because it's something that's new. Sometimes I don't know about it, it's the new highlight of the day.

-Noe

From The Beat: What do you read? Can you toss out some recommendations of good books you like for all the detainees who are stuck in here, and bored like you've been?

RIP Cell

We keeping it lit with you bra and you still livin' in our thoughts.

-Lil' Rony

From The Beat: How close were you to him? However, we hope his death has brought to your attention that if someone you know can be touched, you can, too. There are many different ways you can pay respect to your homie besides lighting up marijuana. What do you intend to do, personally, to ensure that your homie is never forgotten? RIP Cell.

My Dad

Sometimes I be like screw my dad.
Why? Because he be playin',
sayin' he's going to come up here and visit me and my brother,
and he be fakin' shhh, and especially when he tells my mom
that he's tryin' to get a lawyer for my brother
and it's like then he lyin', 'cause if my brother don't get a lawyer,
he's goin' got have to do some time.
I don't want that to happen, 'cause he's my closest brother,
and my only real brother,
and I don't know what I would do without him by my side,
'cause we grew up together and shhh
I got to cut this short. To be continued.

-Lil' Vee

From The Beat: We remember how you said you didn't feel like writing about your dad because it was too hard. But then, you decided to write about him anyway. It seems like you've got a lot of that in you – when you see a challenge, even though your first challenge might be to say, oh, "F that," you always seem to come back and take on the challenge anyway. It's a good sign of some kind of serious internal strength. That strength will get you through whatever is to come, so long as you let it.

One Question, One Answer

BW: Which is stronger, Good or Evil?
MH: They're equal for none have a point to right! Still good people do evil and evil people have good qualities.

-Mainy Hyena

From The Beat: We asked you this question because we know from your previous writing that you have a philosophical approach to life's questions. Also, so much of our own conflicts come from the side of us that wants to do good as it battles with the side of us that wants to do bad. In your life, which side usually wins? Can you think of a time when good prevailed? What about the opposite?

This . . .

This tricked screwed with my bra' and she used to be my female. I even tried to give her a chance after that, but you can't change a bop, so now when I see her, it's a "hi" and a "bye" fast.

-Twin

From The Beat: This incident occurred, but maybe it was for the best? Are you still cool with your bra'? What have you learned from this experience? You shouldn't settle for less. A solid girlfriend would let you know when someone is trying to mess with her, especially one of your friends. Don't allow this experience to get the best of you. Not all females are like your old girlfriend. Are you presently in a relationship?

Halloween/Still Here

This soldier again here at Camp, hella stressin'. Today is Halloween and I'm stuck in here. I thought they would give us a home pass so we could be out with our loved ones, but they didn't.

It's all good though. They built a haunted house for us in the Rec' Hall. It was coo'! It wasn't scary, but it was surprising. Well, anyways, I can't wait till next week. I get to go home for bout four or five days. I guess it's some kinda holiday.

Then two weeks after that is Thanksgiving. We get to go home for like a week! I'll be out this boring-ass Camp for a little while. I ain't gon' lie, I'm 'bout to be out this place early January. I had a talk with my PO last week. She 'bout to look for a court date for me in January. Well, man, I don't know what else to say right now. I'm falling asleep. I'm gonna be out for now. Happy Halloween to the locked up. Stay up.

-Lil' Soldier

From The Beat: It's no fun being locked up on Halloween, or, well, even though they did make that great haunted house, it's less fun that being out with family and friends. Still, you'll have gone home for Veteran's Day by the time you read this, and Thanksgiving's coming up soon. Be coo' out there and don't let all your pent-up energy have you acting too big a foo'. Props on the passes and the early release date — hope it all works out for you.

What's Going Wrong?

Man, what's going wrong? My bra' and my patnas is dying on the streets and I'm in jail, so I can't do nothing about it. I mean, I really think I would kill somebody if I was out there, so I am kinda glad I'm in jail 'cause maybe I would be in jail for a more serious case, but I just wonder why it had to happen to my bra's and patnas? The good ones always die first and sometime I wish it was me instead. We miss y'all and y'all will live in us forever. RIP Cell, Kim, Velle, Tommiesha, Emmit, Bo, Jerm, Mitchell, Jr, J5.

-Lil' Bra

From The Beat: Damn, for someone who has barely started to live, you have lost an awful amount of homies. What good would blasting whoever took out your homies do? You'd be spending the rest of your life behind bars. Is that the kind of life you want to have? You're still alive for a reason. Take a deep look at what your homies that died were doing so you don't follow in their footsteps. Learn from other people's mistakes so it doesn't happen to you. We wish you nothing but the best and we hope that out of your group of friends, you are the one that grows-up to be what they all wished they could be: A successful old person. The question is: What are you going to do to get there?

Ready For it To Be Over

I've been here for a week now, and I'm in here for some BS. I was pushed twice by an undercover cop, and I hit him and now I'm waiting to go to court.

I pray to God I get out soon, this ain't the life for me in here. The worse part about being in here is knowing you're innocent and waiting for the time to go by.

I take this as a learning experience, but I'm ready for it to be over. Time in here goes by so slow when you're waiting and thinking in a small cell. All I can do is pray and leave it up to God, and everything will be alright.

-The One And Only

From The Beat: If it turns out that this little trip to Juvy convinced you one hundred percent to never let yourself get in the clutch of the system again, then we'll see it as time well spent. Like you said, very maturely, it's a learning experience.

I Use My Heart

i use my heart and mind
'cause they both are needed
i just wanted to say r i p
to all my boys that's fallen
but man meanwhile these four walls
ain't for me at all man
get well soon uncle tone

-Lil' Lenny

From The Beat: When you bang your turf as you do in the lines we cut, you answer your question about why the judge won't just forgive you — how you gonna call your team a "killa" crew, and expect anyone who wants to stop the killing just to forgive you and set you free? So you can return to murder in the street? And if you want to claim "murder" and "killa" don't mean what they say, we'd say those words contribute to the environment that maintains a high murder rate.

Hayward Is Home

Home is where i'm the man the only one
boss young man, very good looking, it's home

Aggravated by my thinking state of mind
created by the decisions that life give me

You're the opposite of me 'cause i'm in here
by your actions — but wait nobody did this but me

Wisdom is what i have but can't use
why ... because i'm here ... here i say

As for you ... you may read
you may cry, but me, i'm cool

Reward me for doing so well in Hayward

Disrespect is not where i'm from

-Jermaine

From The Beat: Are you trying to say you should be rewarded for putting in work in Hayward? Or what exactly are you doing so well there? If you're not reading books, it's not likely to be schoolwork. And you don't cry 'cause you're too hard? Too hard-headed to regret your actions? Admitting to a mistake is disrespecting yourself? No, lying to yourself and refusing to change, that's disrespecting your desire to be free.

Hey Brother

Hey, twenty-four hour lockdown is hard! I know 'cause ten hours is hard for me. But don't you parole in 2037? Well, anyways, much love. Stay solid, your little brother, I love you.

-Young Nutts

From The Beat: Parole in thirty years can't be much consolation, 'cause the man walking out isn't much like the man who walked in — and who, if anyone, is still waiting for him on the outs? If you really feel brotherly love, there's little better than getting a letter on lockdown.

No Such Thing As Ghosts

When I was little I used to think there were ghosts. After I saw the movie, "Casper the Friendly Ghost," I used to think there were many ghosts, Casper and this cousins.

I thought if I ever met them, Casper would be the only friendly one. Every day I used to fear that I would run into a ghost and not have anywhere to go.

But then I got older and realized there wasn't any ghosts

-No Name

From The Beat: Little kids believe in anything – ghosts, vampires, monsters, things that go bump in the night. Then we grow up and realize that there are real life monsters just as bad as the ones we dreamed up! But at least now we're adults and (usually) know how to fight them.

Thank You, Mrs. Brown

I'm sitting and the Hall, wonderin' why did I stay in the Hall? Day and night I pray to God that I get out of this place. But some days, I sit and think that the Hall was made for me, because when you don't have nowhere to stay — you have to take advantage of where you have to live. But I ain't mad at nobody, because Mrs. Brown just brought her kids some food!

-Jay

From The Beat: It is sad that for more than a few, the Hall seems like a place made just for you, 'cause when you're a minor with no place else to stay — what you gonna do? Thank Heaven there are counselors like Mrs. Brown there for you.

Get Your Life Together

Man, I been here since September and got to stay all the way till April second because of stupid mistakes I made. I just want to say to everybody in here — keep yo' head up, because you still got time.

-Lil' Larry

From The Beat: So much depends on what you mean by "mistakes". If you mean you should have been slicker, then you're going to fall again sooner or later. But if you mean that committing criminal acts was your mistake, yeah, you've got plenty of time to shake the system and succeed in your life's mission — to live a long, healthy and happy life.

How Do I Do It?

dear death row inmate
what does being a death row inmate feel like?
well I want some advice
about how not to end up on death row

-Scott

From The Beat: We'll let those who know write back to you in The BWO.

Not Happy

I'm not happy anymore, 'cause I am in this place! But I know that I'm getting out soon, so I ain't tripping. But I haven't been here for so long that I forgot all about the system — and it feels like crap being here!

All there is to do in here is chill, kick back and relax. All I do is play bounce in my room with my roommate. But I ain't tripping 'cause when I get out, I'm going to do it live once again!

I hope this is the last time I write The Beat! If not, then I hope next week is the last time I write. One love for everybody in this mud — hope all y'all in here get out one day.

-Teddy Bear

From The Beat: You made a bad decision borrowing that stolo from a friend, even if you weren't the one to steal it. Staying free will require you to make consistently good decisions. It sounds like you've changed a lot to stay out as long as you did, but you need to stay clear on the concept that very little is worth the risk of getting caught up again — 'cause to the court you'll begin to look like an habitual criminal. You feel? Be safe.

To Be Forgiven

No one has ever really ever hurt me that much, but I think I do have a lot to be forgiven for. I remember when I was little, I was such a pyro that I set a small chapel on fire — by accident, of course. By the time they put the fire out, the whole inside was black.

-Young man

From The Beat: Let's say God has forgiven you for that. Would knowledge of God's forgiveness help you change your ways out of gratitude? Do you ever think about trying to make up for the bad things you've done by doing good things whenever you can?

Running Through My Head

Man, I ain't feelin' any of these topics 'cause what's on my mind is missin' my family and homies — and the beezies ... fast! God's keepin' my head on my shoulders, and I'm hoping that I'll be released back to my family! Meanwhile, I just to keep it solid and do my time.

-Lolo

From The Beat: When you think of it as just "doing time" then in reality the time is doing you, 'cause when you're released you go right back to playing a foo' till you get caught up again, next time for a year or two! Naw man, that ain't coo'. Use this time to figure out what you need to do to stay free, like get yourself back in school and/or get yourself a legal j-o-b — so you won't "do time" again for crime in the street.

RIP Lil' Will

everyday memories fly by,
you was a beast who wouldn't listen
bruh it seem like yesterday
you jumpin' off the second floor
while i was fightin'
we all out here keepin it lit day by day
and it don't stop, like clock work
i remember the last time i seen him
when we was by the block
and he was like what's up lil' daddy
and every time i think about him
i think about that day and all i could say
is r i p and i see you when i get there

-No Name

From The Beat: You could say a whole lot more, like you're sorry you reinforced his addiction to war by glamorizing that moment he jumped off the second floor, 'cause living like "a beast" is what got him deceased at way too young an age. You could say the your love for him will never die but you're ready to turn the page, stop flirting with death on the day to day 'cause you're addicted to chasing that fast pay — 'cause what always comes too fast when you're living that way, is judgment day. RIP Lil' Will.

Why I Can't Forgive

I have a hard time forgiven people because my pops told me, "Never forget what they did, but try to get them back." So I just can't forgive whatever the hell I have to get you back for!

But I can forgive my family, because they get a pass. But if you not fam' then you goin' get yours soon, because I'm not goin' stop till I get mine. I tell all my young brah-brah's to keep it lit on that — don't forgive nobody but family.

-Cash Money

From The Beat: Gandhi said that if everyone practices "an eye for an eye" — the world will go blind! And that's exactly what we're seeing in your home streets of Oakland. You're giving out bad advice, and it's taking way too many live — innocent and otherwise. Follow your advice, and the vengeance cycle won't stop till every single member of your family get dropped. Your daddy gave you some bad advice. Look where it got you, man — is this place nice?

The Beat Within

What it do, The Beat Within? Yes, it me "Baby Girl" again. Well, now I go by "Lil Nicky" from Hayward. Well, I get out tomorrow. I'm going to this good ol' rehab program at Thunder Road. They say I got to be up in there for six months!

Well, I'm about to be eighteen in a quick one, so they made me sign this old contract saying that if I run — I gotta do my full custody time! And it's in Santa Rita jail! So I'm 'bout to do this program, 'cause I'm cool with all that grimy trash. Stay up all my folks in the East Bay stackin'.

-Nicole

From The Beat: Your tone's all wrong, 'cause you're still trying your best to pimp the system when you need to go deep within yourself and start to listen to the wisdom you've been missin'. And if you really want to wish your friends the best, you'll be wishing they find a way out of stacking cash in a game that's cold and heartless. Getting clean is not just a chemical thing, but wisdom mental clarity can bring.

Why Can't I Believe?

sometimes i forgive people
sometimes i can't
i don't know why
because people make me so mad
that i feel like i hate that person so much
but at the same time i love that person
so that's why i forgive people
i also forgive my boyfriend
i love him very much
he know who he is
i love you baby with all my heart

-Angelina

From The Beat: To forgive does not mean just to go back to playing the role of the victim to someone else's deception or abuse. Forgive the sinner but not the sin, also means — don't volunteer to be a victim again. Let go of the poison of hate, but don't run back toward the same fate. Whether or not that means don't go back to your boyfriend depends on whether or not he'll just do the same thing again.

What You Know Dog

what you know about us
you know we eatin'
and you know you don't like us
what you know about yo'self
nothing — 'cause you so busy
staying worried about us
but keep my name out yo' mouth
you know that

-Lil' Eli

From The Beat: If all you know about yourself is that you and your crew be "eatin'" — then that explains why you're in the system askin' permission for whatever it is you're needin'. What we're saying is you don't show much self-knowledge here, just concern about what someone else might be puttin' in your ear.

Camp Sweeney

This Lil' Boxer from Hayward, and I'm up here in Camp right now. I been here for about a month, and it is all right up here.

The time goes by way faster than in the Hall, and there are a lot of homies up six months which is only a little time but at the same time, it's a lot. I thought it would be easy to do good here, but I'm already gettin' wrote up and kicked out of class!

I think about all the things out there I am going to miss out on — but I guess I'm just gonna have to sav' it out! But my mind might change, and then I'm gone with the wind.

¬-Lil' Boxer

From The Beat: That's not a good strategy. There will definitely be a moment when you're ready to give up, cut, and run, but that doesn't make it a good idea to do it. Actually there will be more than one moment you'll feel like that, but if you want to sav' it out and get a clean release, you have to make up your mind that you'll stick it out no matter what. Otherwise, you're just wasting your time. But when you get caught up again, you'll be in the Hall wishing you hadn't run and hoping for another chance at Camp.

Hello From Me

What's up wit' it, Beat? This ya boy Barty coming at you from this weak-ash max unit. I'm good, just waitin' on the ride to take me to my new home in San Joaquin County Juvenile Hall. But yeah, I'm gonna get out of here. But to my ninjas out there, keep y'all head up. One love.

-Barty

From The Beat: You asked us if The Beat went to San Joaquin JH, and we don't. But you can write us a piece. Send it to David I. at the address printed at the bottom of page three of every issue of The Beat, and we can send you back a Beat, with you in it.

I Can't Wait!

Man, I almost got released out of Camp! But the court said I have to complete Thunder Road first. But when I do get released, I'm going to go back to Fairfield, where I belong.

When I get out for good, I'm going to try to do good for once. I'm'a try not to mess up life, 'cause like a good friend said to me once, "You have one life and you have one shot to make it in life."

So I'm going to try to make something of myself. That way when people look at me, they will see a successful person — not a mess up!

Until next time, it's your crazy uncle Fairlas saying: Peace and God Bless.

-Fairlas

From The Beat: What's the plan in doing good? What must you avoid? What must you seek? Help us readers understand what steps must be taken to avoid messing up!

What's Up Beat!

This Lil' Chad up here at Camp pimpin' this thang. This program gets easy after a while, but I have been restricted for the last two weeks. I go home this weekend, and I ain't going to come back drunk — because that's why I'm restricted.

But I just gone bounce back and start getting my over-nighters. So, just keep your head up and stay focused. Pimp y'all programs 'cause they can't keep you locked up forever. So stay smart and solid.

-Lil Chad

From The Beat: They can't keep you locked up forever unless you catch an 'L' or keep picking up new charges with each stay — then they can have you spend the rest of your life locked up, or in and out of lock up. So don't just pimp your program, work it — pursue your education, volunteer for work, get job-training, whatever helps you improve your chances of finding legal work and your chances of making that work for you, too.

It's Good

What's up, Beat? These turf visits feel good when you haven't been home for more than a hundred days. My girl was mad though, 'cause I missed her birthday, locked up in here.

But she wasn't trippin' like that — it's good. It's good, like the purple. She said she wanted a kid, but I told her she ain't ready for one 'cause the girl ain't even working, and hasn't finished school yet. You feel me?

I mean, I got money and all, but I don't want a kid right now. But I'm gonna get back at ya wit' another rap. Yo' be easy, see ya.

-Lil' T

From The Beat: She's got a point about missing her birthday. So make sure you stay free after your release. You feel? But you're totally right about the baby thing — she's not ready. And neither are you, 'cause it's not just about money, and even if it was, you have prove you know how to stay free before you have a baby. Put it all together, and you need a job to make money the right way, so you can stay out there with your lady. Later, when you're both older, established, solid and steady, then maybe you'll both be ready to have a baby. We think what she wants is (1) to feel loved, and (2) to keep you. You can handle it, right? It's good.

Stay Fresh

The hood feel so good
But if you ain't packing
You best get to stepping
Ninjas think they hard with guns
But if they don't got one
They gone run
I love the hood
Cause that's where I learned the goods
But I got to go to school
So I won't be a fool
RIP to all my fallen soldiers
I thought I told you
I'm a straight warrior
I grew up in the hood
And that's where I'm gon' be
Ninjas is straight suckas
That's why they rest in peace
But I'ma do what I do best
I'm gonna always stay fresh
'Cause I'm the best
We're from the hood
Watch ya' back
'Cause ninjas is whack

-Lil' Suave

From The Beat: As usually, Suave, you come up with a poem that's half you and half bravado. Part of you recognizes how dangerous and deadly this game is, and the other half is still trying to present like you're some big bad criminal striking fear in the heart of passersby. It's like you almost admire that .... but the thing is, you are way too good for that BS. Deep down you know that the streets and the hood have given you nothing but grief. They've stolen your sports life, they've stolen your feeling of success. The only thing they haven't stolen yet is your future – but are you going to hold on to it, or are you going to give it up to the streets?

To My Ninjas

This is Lil' E at Camp, waitin' to go home so I can do my thang wit' my real ninjas. Free tha real, do it movin'! Can't let this jail thang get to me. Got to get paid, get money! The good die young.

-Lil' E

From The Beat: The bad die younger, so get your pay some kind of legal way. Don't go back to spot to grind everyday.

Waiting To Get Out

What up, Beat? Man, I can't wait to get up and out of here! It went all good in court on Friday. The judge had wanted to send me to CYA, but I got lucky and got a group home release!

But man! I'm just hoping I do right there! 'Cause if I get terminated from the group home, I'm not going home — I'm going straight to CYA!

So I just keep my head up and do what I got to do! All right, Beat, till next time. Later.

-Tonic

From The Beat: You caught a break. Now make it work for you. It'll take more than hoping you don't get terminated. It'll a no-matter-what approach about completing the program. Whether staff likes you or not, whether some fool is making you mad or not — keep successfully completing the program your top priority! Then when you get home, be wise and be safe.

Game Over

okay, game over, young boy
i need money, big, fast money
cash money, you know
i got five min's to get
in and out, young boy
go in seven/eleven he gets a
big bag full of newports
and he tells the teller to
give up the money and don't
forget to lift the till
young boy got the money
and hop in the suburban
and they cuts on the mac'
then to the way-way
i'm out and went to my girl's house
went to the bedroom and pull out the money
my girl was stutterin' then she roll up the cush
and when i woke up — it was the end of the
young boy
no money — just me and my girl and the cush,
ya know

-Walter

From The Beat: So are you saying you smoked up your ill-gotten gain? Or that it was a dream that went up in smoke when you awoke? Either way, this boy got a second chance, even if he woke up in a juvenile jail cell, 'cause some meet a gun in the 7/11 and count their losses up in heaven — or in hell. Wherever they go, there's no more story here on earth to tell.

What It Do!

What it do everybody. This Lil' Young. Some might know me some might have heard of me. I'm back in here for something foolish. I'm still chin up like the king I was born you feel me. I can't forgive myself for some of my mistakes like, getting locked up again and getting locked up in the first place. To my sis in intake that I meet on Fairfax stay strong I'm gonna see you on the outs you feel it. We still struggling out here this system is set to failure so excel your intelligence and think your way out this system

Everybody keep yo' head up ,as I will too. One love to the solid. Long live solid people.

-Lil' Young

From The Beat: Yes. Cultivating a strong intellect key. It's maybe the only way that you can find a way out of the cycle so many of you are in. Intelligence is really the strongest weapon we can use against challenges to our selves or our communities. If we don't take time to think, we are vulnerable and easier to take advantage of, to treat with disrespect.

but one thing that i do is
laugh through it all
and just be happy to be here

When No One Believes

The life of a black man trying to turn his life around, when no one believes that he is. 'Cause the feeling I have about this situation is I have seen so many people come in and out so many times and I only been here once. But they don't know what I'm tryna do.

-Dan

From The Beat: For what it's worth, we believe you mean it, we believe you ARE trying to turn your life around. Instead of worrying about the haters, or the people who don't understand, just focus on yourself and your hopes and dreams, and maybe most important, your PLAN for success. We're waiting to hear it.

Baby'Momma Problems

girl that kid is my world
but when you make me mad
i just want to kick yo' ash
girl what do you want from me
you done had my baby
now you need some cash
too bad fo' yo' ash
i keep my kids tight
but now you came with this
and it ain't right
i know i'm out there
wet in my whip
but that's me ain't it
so what if you don't have a car
i'm not god
now it's time for me to go
i got some purell on line
don't act like you don't know
so how much you need
you got change for these fifties, no
huh, then you don't have no dough

-Bra-bra

From The Beat: It is hard to believe you're talking to the mother of your child like this. We don't know what her words look like, but the ending of this poem is just not right. First of all, you're in max in the Hall, not rolling around town in your fancy car flashing fifties. And even if you were out there, we hear you say you're tight with your kids, but we don't see much care in this poem anywhere. Maybe next week you can write a poem for your child (you don't even say if the baby's a boy or a girl), and we'll understand better how you're living your life to show your children a father's love in this cruel world. For sure you can't give your child a kiss good night when you're locked up in here doing time — those fifty dollar bills are not worth the time. Quit, go legit, and really show some love for your kids.

Change

still don't know why
these ninjas act like they know me
life a pain, then ya die
why you had to do that
i going to be me
so just let a ninja live one time
i see these peoples trying to cross me
but i going to fight until somebody
murder my young ass, put me
away up in a graveyard or something
my life is like it is a earthquake
lightning and thunder
it's like yo' boy is just in one'a big old storms
that same like it ain't never going to shine
like god is torturing me right now
but one thing that i do is laugh through it all
and just be happy to be here
it hard for people to feel like me and still be
joyful
and with a smile on they' faces
because a ninja like me got to stay sharp
it like i'm trapped with no way out
but i am a soldier though
so go' to have to live by this code forever
don't matter how bad the weather
going to get on me
like i said to the day i die
just don't stop me
ninjas got to pay their taxes

-Choyce

From The Beat: The street soldier's code has got to be re-written, 'cause the way it goes everyone's 'bout to be smitten down by stormy weather, locked in a cell wearing a frown or pasting a smile on their face like a clown 'cause no matter how many tears hit the ground, you'll never float out of here on that river of pain. As for the environment provided by your peers in the hall, there will always be haters and fake congratulaters — so take a step back. There might be one or two ready to face the facts and drop the acts that lead nowhere but jail or death. Even if you have to do it alone, keep your head up and do your best.

Why I Can't Forgive

One reason I can't forgive is: how could I forgive a ninja that shot my brotha? I just wouldn't be able to be around him, 'cause I think I would do something really bad to him. If I was to see him, I would probably hurt him really bad. He messed up my brother's life — so I would have to ruin his.

-Barty

From The Beat: We understand the difficulty you'd feel in even thinking about forgiving him, but that doesn't mean you'd have to ruin your life trying to do him in. Your brother needs you as role model on how to turn your life around and get out of this scandalous, violent, self-destructive life style. So don't see dude at all, and if you do see him, walk away as fast as you can. Let go and let God, 'cause you can be sure He's got a plan.

Keep Your Head Up

Always keep yo head up don't matter where you at if you in jail or on the streets always watch yo back cause ninjas is haters. Just get yo money 'cause fonking ain't it. I lost a lot of ninjas in the streets that got robbed and killed or fonking and got killed or just at the wrong place at the wrong time.

I felt bad that ninjas gone, but glad they in a better place. To my fallen soldiers. RIP Meezy, Meach, Tim, Terrance, Ant, Blob, and Lil' Boo.

-Lil' Ronta

From The Beat: We don't believe that everyone, everywhere are haters, but that it's the people you surround yourself with. The environment you're in. And as far as your friends being in a better place— wouldn't it be worth it to make this world a little better, a little easier for you and your community to thrive and be happy? What do you think it would take to make that happen?

Letter to a Lifer

What's up with you? Well, me, I'm in jail right now, and everyday I think about how the judge is trying to give me all of that time! He's talking about giving me twenty years!

But it ain't nothing, if I'm alive right now 'cause I'm going to be free — know that! Got money to get me out of here — so it's nothing.

-Choyce

From The Beat: One of the problems with growing up with a gangster mentality is that you're taught to believe that everything is a matter of money. Everyone needs money, but not everything can be bought with money. That's not to say you won't be free, just that you need to keep working on your mentality so you can see more clearly than you did in the streets.

The Future

Five years from now this is my car on 22's and all you people that's doin' bad, y'all could be doin' good with me. Get on the A-team.

-Nario

From The Beat: Does that mean you're going to wait five years to start doing good, or does it mean you're going to be working hard for five years and then have a sweet car as a reward? We, of course, hope it's the latter, and we hope too that your peers take your advice and start doing good with you.

I Can Forgive

I can pretty much forgive anybody as long as they don't try to kill me or mess wit' my family or loved ones.

Another thing I don't really forgive is someone talking about my dead grandma. I once had to beat on my uncle for saying that he thought I caused my grandma's death. We had got into an argument and I was making him look stupid. He didn't have anything to say, so he went off and said some stupid stuff and got his ass beat.

-Young Weezy

From The Beat: A wise man ignores the words of a fool. For sure, your beating up your uncle didn't bring your granny back but just made the family feel worse, as a matter of fact. Why give anyone that power over you, that with a word they can have you throwin' down like a foo'. Just walk away, then think about forgiving his foolish, angry words some other day. That's what you're granny would want. Okay?

Fake

All these ninjas do up here is talk. They ain't 'bout nothin'. My whole three months here, I ain't seen nobody be about what they sayin'. They either sucka out of it or just end up being coo' with the dude.

I just hate seeing all this fake-ass stuff. I'm telling you, watch when they get to the pen' — they ain't gone survive, and that's on everything. They got that kid's mind still. They ain't mature.

There's a time and a place to be goofy and stupid. I ain't gon' front: I be goofy sometimes, but when it's the right time! You feel me. Honestly, I just feel like takin' off on someone's head! But I stop and I think.

I got better things to worry 'bout. I got to get home on the weekends. I got a family comin' and I got to support them with all I got. So this drama ain't worth it. Let them suckas find out on their own. They will come across a real ninja that will wire their talk. So to all, keep it solid with everybody — but most important: be yourself! I'm out. Alrato.

-Lil' Soldier

From The Beat: The problem is the stupid talk, not that no one follows through on their stupid threats. It's a good thing these threats aren't followed through on, but it's stupid that these same fools keep bumpin' their gums like they're really sayin' somethin'. You're right to rise above the bull and keep first things first — and getting home on weekends to see new family comes first. That and doing a program so you get a clean release. Then don't go back to the street for your money — get a j-o-b.

Too Young To Be Bad

you is hella young
quit tryin' to spit game
'cause you sound real dumb
no I don't want to "you know what"
you ain't got that much luck
you might want to holla at a girl
that talks to young boys
'cause i am not the one
man i'm gettin' mad
so i guess i'm done
let me ask you one question
before i end the fun
have you went through puberty

-Lil' Lady Skittles

From The Beat: Use this situation to see it's totally a matter of maturity. Why fall for the same lines from someone older? It's the whole sex is demeaned today among your peers, with all the talk about players and pimps in here. You may feel disrespected by a youngster, but stay just as clear-headed when you meet his older brother.

Ugh!!!

sittin' in my cell
wonderin' why the hell
some need to snitch
why they go run and tell
i just want to yell
this is ridiculous
i swear some people is idiots
lying about stupid stuff
is it really that serious
ain't got to lie to kick it
so you should really just quit it

-Lil' Lady Skittles

From The Beat: Take the spotlight off of them and put it on you. It's not snitches that got you in here, but what you've been choosing to do.

Handlin' My Business

What's up Beat! This yo' homie, doing time with my homies up here in da dogg pound. I fought and got kicked off of top citizen but it's all gravy. I'm still handling my business, tryin' to get back so I can get a straight through and call my baby girl. Anyways, to all, chin up and chest out.

-Curious

From The Beat: No more Top Citizen? We hope that by the time this gets printed you've earned your way back up to those privileges you get. Chin up, chest out, all good advice. But can we also add: Life right, Mind Straight?

Forgiveness Matters

Why can't you forgive? Can you forgive the person that hurt you or try to hurt you in a bad way? I know I hurt somebody in a bad way; she called the police on me and I went to jail. If it's your first time doing a crime that shhh is not cool at all.

-Sean

From The Beat: Some things can be forgiven easily, others are more difficult to forgive, and a few things are just unforgivable. All you can do at this point is try to learn your lesson—really learn it—and then apply it to the rest of your life. Use this time locked up to think about how you're going to avoid this place in the future.

Letter To A Lifer

It must suck to be a life-sentencer! Do you eat a lot of good food? Do you wear any Jordans? How is life in there? Having any fun? Must suck to be you! Nah, but now you know you should of not did the crime, and that's what I have to keep in mind when I get released from the Hall. Stay up, y'all.

-Pooh Stick

From The Beat: Actually a few do wear Jordans. It all depends on if you're lucky enough to have someone on the outs who cares enough to send you packages and canteen money. What really sucks most, is being forgotten, and also being in the pen' with no money on your books, or having to hustle each month to get a few dollars on your books.

Another Day

Man, it's another day in juvenile hall, but I'm not trippin'. I should be getting out in another month. I'm eighteen, too. So when I get released, I won't be on probation or any other thing that might hold me back.

When out, I will work toward my GED. And once I got that, I'm off to the Navy! I've grown out of all this negative garbage. It's time for a change.

-White Boy Ant

From The Beat: Hey, it's great to hear you sounding so upbeat and positive about your future. Like they say, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Now just follow through. Kudos and props to you!

My Brain

I use my brain more than my heart, I'm a thinker not so much in a scholarly way because why do something everybody else is doing when you could make your own decisions?

In my "clique" I'm almost always the one makin' decisions for all my patnas except our patna Lucky, so he's like the only other one with a straight head. We get bored quick so when we're bored we gotta have something to do and everybody else's ideas are boo boo. Now, whether or not my ideas are on the right side of the law or not it's generally mine that goes. If it' s goin' to the mall to get some numbers or creep around the block and hit a lick.

I know it's wrong to hit licks I wouldn't want my house broken into and jacked but that doesn't go through our heads at the time. It's getting in quiet, grab anything of value and get out without getting caught. I'm not sayin' doin' the right thing is boring all the time but it does get boring. When you do something unlawful most of the time you get an adrenline rush which is way better than any high. If you (or we) used your heart and your brain together there would be a lot better ideas an activities in the works.

-Aris

From The Beat: Well Aris, you're obviously an intelligent person, sort of, who thinks a lot about things, but it seems like you're missing some things; maybe you let your actions get away from your sharp mind when you're having the adrenaline rush you talk about. You hang around guys who are not too sharp?? You admit that you wouldn't want someone to break into your house, but are able to somehow justify doing it to someone else. As for committing crimes just because you're bored—well, do we really have to say it? Bad idea. What about being stuck in juvie, isn't that more boring than anything? Good luck figuring things out for yourself, we know you're smart enough to do so, hopefully it won't be too late.

Can't Wait To Go Home In Two Days

Man I'm in Juvenile hall. I got court in two days. I can't wait. I stay in my room all day thinking what am I going to do when I get out. The first thing I'm going to do is I'm going to ask my mom to make me some good food.

-Martin

From The Beat: What will you do after the good meal? Are you going to go back to the things you did to end up in juvie or are you thinking now about ways to stay away from your old life, your old ways. Good luck.

In The Right Direction

When I get out of jail I am going to change my life around. I got in here from breaking into people's houses. I hope to go the right direction next time so I won't end up back in this jail. I am now going to be my own person.

-Tyrell

From The Beat: It's one thing to hope, and another to plan. Going the right direction is your choice, so make it! Tell us how you will do this!

Keep Yo' Head Up

to all who are locked up
keep yo' head up
and holla at a boss
yeah, you to ally-bo
see you in the beat fo' sure.

-Crystal

From The Beat: Forget that talk about who's boss and who's not, 'cause everyone in here needs to learn from the loss you just got.

I Pray

When I don't feel happy I talk to the big man,
God.
He always listens to me.
That makes me happy to have somebody to talk
to,
because these ninjas in here make me mad.
But it's not my fault they want to be stupid
so I am going to pray 'til I can't pray no more
and stay believing in God
and do what I got to do to stay on earth.
So keep on praying and He will listen always.

-Stuwie

From The Beat: Faith in God is a beautiful gift, you are lucky. Besides praying until you can't pray no more, what's your plan to live a healthy life? God and...?

Been Gone a Minute

Love is but a sparkle in the shining sky
All we have to do is let raise
Days go past and night came over
My love stand tall as a mighty soldier
I've been gone for a minute, baby I know
There after let's get married and our love can grow
It all was be me and you
I love hearing the sound of the words baby I love you
I know the love is true I can feel it in the air
You're my queen I'm your kind and the love we'll share
Love you boo
My wifey Meka.

-Terrance

From The Beat: Nothing like a good love poem to ease the pain of solitude. We hope your poem makes your girl happy, and more importantly, we hope you get out soon and let that love help you get your life straight! Peace!.

Why Can't You Forgive

Because if somebody did something to me like bump into me, I will forgive them, but if they tried to hurt one off my family members, I will not forgive them.

-Delvonta B1

From The Beat: Did you see that in Pennsylvania last month a crazy man murdered six girls in a religious community called the Amish. The next day, the community came together to pray not just for the victims, but also for the man who committed the crime and his family. How do you imagine they were able to do that? What do you think about that? Will this help them heal? Have you ever hurt your own or someone else's family members? Would you like to be forgiven for that?

Letter To A Lifer

If I committed a crime and I they bring me to jail and they gave me the death sentence, I will miss my family and I will just do my time and pray that they put me on parole.

-Delvonta B1

From The Beat: People living under a sentence of death never get paroled, Delvonta, unless the government admits it made a mistake. This isn't much of a "letter," is it? It's only a single sentence! Next time, please choose only one topic to write about, and really write about it. You have an entire hour to think about what you want to write and to write it. You can do better.

Why Can't You Forgive

I can forgive but I can't forget. As long as I can remember, it makes it harder to forget.

-Young Kid B1

From The Beat: Do you believe that it's good to forgive (even if it's hard)? Have you ever messed up and hoped someone would be kind enough to forgive you? As for forgetting, the mind is a strange thing. As time passes, we all forget what we swore we'd always remember, so maybe forgiving becomes easier with time, too. (P.S. In the hour you have to work on these topics, you can do better than producing just two sentences!)

I Miss The Block

Man, I really miss the block on the real though, 'cause I been in here for like 50 some days now. I miss the block 'cause I could be on the block smokin' purp right now, messin' with some girls or something. With the big homies. Or helpin' Grams right now with my little brother. Man I miss the block.

-D B2

From The Beat: You gave your tired grandmother exactly one little mention, but you talked about the block on every line! So it's obvious to us — as it is not obvious to you — that you'd better help your grams out real fast, because you won't be free for very long! With all your attention focused on the block, on smoking weed and on your homies, you are writing your own return ticket to lock-up. Maybe you like it here?

I Can't Forgive Who Killed My Ninjas

Dem ninjas killed my big cousin, Killa Mont, and ma ninja Thizzelle Ant. I can't forgive dem ninjas, because I loved my ninjas that they killed. I will never be able to forgive dem ninjas who killed Killa Mont and Thizzelle Ant. We all we got. We goin' miss you ninjas.

-Lil' Na Na B1

From The Beat: We feel very sorry about your loss, Lil' Na Na. But we have to point out that everyone feels exactly the same as you about their own lost loved ones. Have you (or Mont or Ant) ever contributed to someone else's death? If so, you have left someone just like you crying for their loss and feeling the same emotions you're feeling now. You may not be able to forgive them, but we hope you are not plotting to take revenge, because all that does is continue a cycle of tears and pain — not for those who pay with their lives, because they are beyond pain — but for the innocent mothers and brothers and sisters and lovers left behind.

Can't Wait To Get Out

What's up wit' it, Beat? This yo' boy, Lil' Purp, holdin' it down for my town. I'm in YGC, actin' a donkey. Man, I can't wait ta go back to the block and be wit' my ninjas, 'cause man, I miss my dogs.

-Lil' Purp B1

From The Beat: You know, Lil' Purp, we're not sure we believe you when you tell us how much you miss your dogs. It seems like every time you get back with them, you last a week or less before you end up being taken away again because of your own actions. So, maybe you don't miss the outs as much as you say...

Why Can't You Forgive?

I can't forgive because sometimes you just can't forgive people for some shhh. Because I know it some one out there that can't forgive me for some stuff I did. 'Cause if you kill someone, you can't forgive them for that. Man, that's about it. Why can't you forgive?

-D B2

From The Beat: There's a difference between not wanting to forgive and not being able to forgive. You say that you can't forgive someone for killing, but we know of many people who have forgiven the killers of their loved ones. It takes a very special kind of courage to do that, and maybe a certain kind of upbringing. Yes, it would be very hard for us to forgive in that situation, too, but that doesn't mean it can't be done.

Dear Death Row Inmate

What did you do to get a death sentence? Is it worth it? What do you feel about getting the death sentence? Aren't you sad abut getting the death sentence, because you ain't never gonna see your family and you're gonna be stuck in jail forever? Aren't you gonna be tired of doing the same thing every day for the rest of your life? I wish the best for you, though.

-Joseph B1

From The Beat: What do you think your death row inmate would write you back if you sent a letter like this? There is only one crime in the United States that can earn you the death penalty, so we hope you never commit it! (You can guess what that crime is.)

To You Who Have "Life"

To you that have life, I feel sorry for you. What were you thinking when you did what you did? I can tell you what I was thinking. I thought I would not get caught. I feel sorry for you, but I have to go.

-Money B1

From The Beat: We like this little letter to a lifer, MB, but you could have written a much longer letter in the hour you had. We'd love for you to fill out the details of this piece. For example, now that you see that you can be caught (and that you have been caught), how will that change your life so that you don't end up receiving a letter like this?

Set Up By A Friend

The person I could not forgive was my boy. He set me up. He had made me get caught for him wit' hella hot shhh. I ain't never gonna forgive him because I ain't never seen him after anywhere around. And he took my five dollars.

-Lil' Hector B4

From The Beat: We don't want to excuse the "friend" who let you take the fall, but we also don't want to let you off the hook for your own responsibility for being where you are right now. He didn't "make you" get caught. You knew what you were doing; you knew the stuff was stolen, and you thought you could get away with something. If you held yourself to a higher standard, maybe you would find it easier to forgive him... and yourself.

I Been Goin' Through Some Thangs

What's up wit' it, Beat? Man, I been going through some thangs. Man, I just been on some otha shhh — missin' my family and my ninjas, and thinking like I should have never did what I did to get in here, but I just think about some people got life, and the little shhh I do won't get me life, so I just keep running from group homes.

I miss blowin' it down and sippin' bo and driving cars. I'm missin' my cousin, Davon. Rest in Peace. I love that ninja, but right now I'm stressin' and I been goin' through some thangs.

-Lil' Purp B1

From The Beat: We're sorry you're going through it, Lil' Purp, but to keep it real, you just keep putting yourself through it! You are not a leaf floating down stream with no ability to change direction. You have a brain and the ability to make your own choices, so if you are stressing, look carefully at the choices you are making. You just keep writing about the block and smoking and drinking, so of course you keep repeating the same patterns that bring you here over and over again. You say you don't have to worry about getting a life sentence since you do only "little shhh," but one thing we know for sure is that our prisons are full of people doing long sentences (right up to life) for behavior they never predicted could lead to that... They were doing minor dirt, but were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Yet, nothing they can do now can UNDO what they did to get themselves locked up for good. It's too late for them. It's not too late for you!

Holding Grudges

I don't think I could forgive because I hold grudges. I'm always gone have that feeling that's reminding me what so and so did in the back of my head.

-Robert B2

From The Beat: Forgiving is not the same as forgetting. You can keep what they did in the back of your head, while at the same time, you can forgive them for it. We're not telling you that's what you should do, only that's what you could do.

Why Can't I Forgive?

I can't forgive the person who killed ma father because tha person who did it took ma role model, ma male figure. It hurt me so much because ma mother can't teach me how to be a man, only ma father can. And that's what hurts me.

It's hard for me because I got a lil' bra' that look just like ma father, and looking at ma bra is like looking at ma pops. Knowing who did it hurts me, but I try to keep it to myself. What hurt me til' this day is I can't get revenge. I don't have to do shhh... tha' game will.

-Mook Guda B2

From The Beat: We're glad that you have not been able to act out on your desire to get revenge because that would end up hurting you a lot more than you're already hurting. Don't you see that killing the killer takes him out of his pain and misery, but puts a bunch of innocent people (like his mother, his sisters and brothers) into the same kind of pain and misery you're feeling over the loss of your father. So you're really taking revenge not on the person who did the deed (since he won't know anything at all once he's gone), but on those who are left to grieve him. Does it matter to you at all that those who suffer the worst pain from this ongoing war are the women and children left to cry?

Why Can't You Forgive

To me forgiveness is a very important thing. Because if you kill somebody it would be hard to forgive somebody.

-Hot Rod B2

From The Beat: We agree, it would be very hard to forgive someone for murder. But then, last month an entire community in Pennsylvania did just that... Six of their little girls were murdered by a crazy man who came to their Amish school, and the very next day, the Amish community joined together to pray for the murderer and his family!

Back In Here

Wassup Beat? This young Sapo back in here for some dumb stuff that I did in my grouper that I was at. I was almost done with it, but at the last minute I messed up. Now I'm tryna get back to the hut and do what I got to do to stay coo'.

I'm not tryna get sent away again, or start all over, you feel me. I'm tryna see if I can get that second chance and show these people that I can take care of business, and also show them that a young cholo can succeed. I don't care what anyone else got to say.

-Sapo B2

From The Beat: You may not care what anyone else got to say, but since you're writing in The Beat, we're going to have to say something anyway. What this piece makes us wonder about is whether you deliberately sabotaged your success at the grouper? Have you analyzed your own actions and motives in causing trouble just before you were about to complete your program? Could it be that you don't think you're ready to go out there and be safe and stay free? Could it be that this place is helping you do something that you don't want to admit?

Never Forgive My Dad

I can never forgive my dad, ever in my life, because when I was born he left my mom and my sister. When I was not even 15, he went back to our family. But still, even though he calls me and my sister and my mom, I don't care — I'm still not forgiving him.

-Joseph B1

From The Beat: Have you talked to him about why he abandoned you when you were born? What does he say? We hope you would never do this to your own children when that time comes.

In Jail For Murder

What's up Beat? I just wanted to write about my big cousin. He in jail right now for murder. He still taking it to trail. I don't think he really did it, and I hope he get out soon.

He was like my big brother. He always put me on, like give me money and I stayed lookin' fresh. I really hope he beat this and get out. If I got to talk to him, I would tell him I love him and keep ya head up, ya hear me.

-Darius B2

From The Beat: If you learned that your big cousin was actually guilty of this crime, would you still want him to escape the consequences? Can you see that everyone is connected to people who love them, and when anyone loses his life, there are always people like you left behind to suffer and to grieve. Have you given any thought to the murdered victim (whether your cousin committed the crime or not)? Do you wonder about the tears his mother, family and loved ones are shedding over his loss? Are their tears less meaningful as yours?

Regret Situation- But Same Actions

Since I was 15 years old in 2005, I've been on paperwork. Ever since that one day, the smallest citation could bring me back. A year later, I'm here again and my arrests haven't been no little robbery or fighting. They see me as a "cowboy" and a "Tony Montana."

The truth is, if I could go back to any of those situations, I would, but I would just walk a different way. I wouldn't stop moving and I would be free. As simple as that.

Now I feel like, "I got caught! Dammit! Let's get it over with." I wouldn't change a thing but my Hot-Boy route. I know you peoples at The Beat might say there's something wrong with my brain, or start preaching in some words, but I heard it all before. I'm just being real. That what the 'hood and my folks taught me — be real no matter what. Be a real banger or a real square, whatever. You should get it already, just be real.

I learned a lot and seen a lot, and there's still much more for me to see and learn. This life I'm gonna live it and the homies are gonna see me enjoying the luxuries of life. I'm bring them with me once I get off paper.

-Young P-Back B2

From The Beat: You say you've "heard it all before," but we don't think so. Oh, people have said it all before to you, but we don't think you've heard it yet. You still think you can get over, so there's no need for you to listen to any of it. You recognize that you have a lot more to learn, but you don't think you can learn any of that from folks like The Beat telling you what kind of future you're writing for yourself. It's not the system that sees you as Tony Montana, it's you who sees yourself in that light and who takes pride in the rep. But the truly sad part is that there's a real possibility you will only learn what it means to be a responsible adult after you take that extra step, the one that leads to a lifetime of "If only..." and "I wish..."

Dear Gangsta Flea,

What 'sup with you? This is your cousin little Jokes. How you holding up in there? Hopefully good. As for me, I'm doing kinda bad. I'm locked up over here at YGC waiting to see if I'm going to be tried as an adult or a juvenile. My options are CYA or the Ranch. If I get tried as an adult, I'm going to 850 Bryant and be tried as an adult. If so I'll probably be up there in a few with you and the other homies.

But anyways, before I got locked up, I seen your daughter. She's getting big. How long has it been since you seen her? Well, I'm going cut this short. Be safe up there.

-Jokes B4

From The Beat: We noticed that you didn't ask your cousin any questions about what his life was like in the pen, or what advice he might have for you if you have to join him there. What do you think he would tell you if he knew you might be on your way to join him? Will he be proud of you or disappointed in you? Are you proud of yourself?

RIP OG

Man, what's up with The Beat? I really miss my big bra OG. He was really one of my loved ones. It's just like he was here with us playin' p.s.2 with us. Man the day he left us it really hurt me real bad 'cause I really know him all my life man. I miss you big bra. See you again one day. RIP OG.

-D B2

From The Beat: We're sorry about the death of your friend... just as we're sorry about every death we read about week after week! Could OG have done anything to change the direction and outcome his life took? Can you?

Family Theft

Man, my cousin had took something that was so important to me. And I was askin' him if he had my shhh and he said, "Na." So I was like, "OK," but he was my right hand. Like a week later, I found him wit' ma shhh and I was hot. I beat his ass and he was like can I forgive him. I was like, Hell na, bra. You trippin'. It took a year to get over it, then after that it was cool.

-Hotboy B2

From The Beat: It's hard to know the right thing to do when family is involved. After all, your cousin will be your cousin for as long as you live, so we're glad that you were able to get over it, even if it took you a full year!

Can't Forgive The Liars

Why I can't forgive anyone that lies. And say you touched them. That's not right, because you spending time in jail for nothing. That not right. I cannot forgive someone that do that stuff.

-Brian B2

From The Beat: Do you mean you are here for no reason other than that someone lied about you? Yes, that would be a hard thing to forgive!

Thinking

Thinking about what I want to do. Thinking about how I'm going to succeed in life — where I'm going to be in five years, am I going be dead or alive, or just livin' a simple life away from this bullshhh that I'm in right now.

That's something to think about. Don't think about it when it's too late, talking about, "I could've, or should've." That's where you messed up at. Thizz is young Enano and I'm out.

-Enano B4

From The Beat: It's encouraging to read that you're spending some of your time doing some critical thinking and not waiting for some unknown time in the future. When you warn the readers not to wait until you make that one mistake too many, you sound like a Beat staff writing a "From The Beat" response! In other words, we couldn't have said it any better!

Brain Vs. Heart

What controls me is my brain. When I do something bad then my heart controls me.

For example, when I'm going to rob someone, my heart tells me no but my brain tells me yes. I do it. When I have to face the consequences, then my heart comes in. Then my heart tells me, "Why you did it? You coulda been outside with yo' family and yo' folks. Now you stuck here."

Then my brain stays silent.

-Yung B B5

From The Beat: Okay, let us be your heart: "You could've been outside with your family and your folks. Now you suck in here." Come on, Yung B. You say that your brain controls you, but this piece doesn't tell us that you're even using your brain! It's time you did!

Why Can't You Forgive

It's sets and people that till this day I can't forgive because it's people from where they're from killed my family members and homies. So I can't forgive them. Just like if one of ma ninjas killed one of yo' homies you won't forgive them. It's just the way of life, ya heard. This shhh crazy.

My bra Nitro got killed and you think I'm go forgive the ninjas that killed him? Hell na! This shhh ain't go ever stop. Don't matter how hard you tryin' to get out the game or squash the beef, its just too many people died in this shhh.

But sometimes I think 'bout w'at if I wasn't from where I from and not gang bangin'. So until y'all slide back through, I'll be gravy.

-Al-Bundy B5

From The Beat: Yes, it would be very hard (maybe impossible) for us to forgive people who hurt or killed those we love. But some people are able to do it and have done it, so maybe it's worth thinking about. And we can't give up hope that the beef in the streets will end one day, even if you don't see it happening. After all, millions of people were killed in two world wars, both of which came to a negotiated end. Even though the war in Iraq looks endless, we all know it will have an end one day. Who knows, AB, maybe you or on of your friends will be the peacemaker, the leader that others can follow into a new view of the world which demands respect for all of God's creations...

Dear Death Row Inmates

Damn! Y'all messed up big, huh! Well now, y'all did what y'all did and regret it a lot. Now you can't be with your family be with your girl and do anything. But I learn from my mistakes and other mistakes, like I wouldn't like to be in prison for life. But I hope y'all do good 'cause when I get out I'ma do my best, and hope I don't catch no more cases.

-David B4

From The Beat: Why do you "hope" you won't catch any more cases when you get out of here? If you don't break any more laws, you won't catch any more cases. If you keep doing what brought you here, you will be catching more cases. It's really as simple as that... or are we missing something?

Don't Want To Come Back

Wa's up? This is Tweety from San Francisco. I got here because I did some stupid shhh out there. But I ain't tripping because I know that someday I'll get released and I'll be doing good things 'cause I don't wanna come back in this place.

-Young Tweety

From The Beat: Nobody wants to come back to this place, Tweety, but not wanting to come back is not enough to keep you from coming back. That requires some real changes in how you operate on the outs. What kind of "good things" do you plan to do when they release you this time? What kind of "bad things" do you plan to stop doing?

Letter For A Real Mom

Dear Mama,

Hey Ma, what's good? Nothin' for me. As you can see, ever since you left us, shhh went all down hill for ya baby boy. Don't mean to blame it on you 'cause you know you did your part as the best mom you could have been.

I'm tired of this bullshh life I live. Mom, I miss you so much and can't wait to show you the man you made. Love you so much. And one day you know we will be with each other again, just let me get rich first and enjoy life like you did. RIP Pia Robles

-Periko B4

From The Beat: How do you plan to get rich and enjoy your life? If your plan includes some of the same behavior that got you in here, then your plan will only make the system rich. We want to encourage you to focus on the fact that you're "tired of this bullshhh life." How tired of it are you? Enough to change it?

Locked Up . . . Again

What's up Beat? I'm back again, this time in B4. But every time I come back, it's for a reason because on the outs I was doin it big. Maybe I was doin' too much and coming in here is gone make me calm down.

On the real, I ain't trippin'. This is like my second home. I jus' come in here to think 'bout everything and get back to normal. But I don't know sometimes what to do, gettin' in the money, females, cars, clothes. I'm just the real definition of a real thug on the streets.

-Darius B4

From The Beat: Well, if you're "the real definition of a real thug" out there, then you're "the real definition of a baby slave" in here! If this is your second home, you'd better start thinking about that next "home" the system has in store to "reward" you for being that street thug. Enjoy what you have here because the "normal" you'll have there won't include any females (ever), you won't even be allowed you to handle money (but they'll be happy to handle all the money you're pouring into their pockets), and you'll be able to enjoy the luxury of hours, days, weeks, months and years just to sit with your own thoughts and wonder how things might have been...

My Brain

I think with my brain. That's how I make moves in the streets. I think of this game the same way as I do in a game called chess. I make the right moves so I won't come up short — and so no one can put me in checkmate. And from time to time I use my weapon — my queen — to attack and hit 'em hard at first sight. And my brain, I use it to fight against all the rooks and knights.

-Dubb B4

From The Beat: Well, we hope you play chess better than you play the game that led you here! Do you ever see yourself as a pawn being played by others?

Stressing In The Max

Man, this yo' boy Fat T in B5 maximum security. They got Fat T stressing up here. I'm about to do the time for all my little brothers that's locked up. I love y'all. Keep yo' head up. Love, Fat T, always.

-Fat T B5

From The Beat: Every time you come in here, you stress. But every time you go out there, you turn around and come right back. What's up with that?

Regrets

W'at it do Beat? This that vato Cartoon from San Francisco. Man, I'm right here chillin' with the homies holdin' it down. Look, I did a lot of crazy shhh. I don't regret w'at I did, but I regret getting caught.

-Cartoon B5

From The Beat: So, unfortunately, we predict you'll be doing a lot of regretting along the way cause you just keep getting caught... Hmmmm...
What's wrong with this picture?

Pinky And The Brain

I'm pretty sure ya remember the cartoon "Pinky and the Brain." That's how I felt before. I always thought I was smart and invincible, but when I get caught I feel hecka stupid. So do whatever you do in the street, but karma is going to catch up to you.

-Lifer B4

From The Beat: For those of us who don't remember "Pinky and the Brain," can you explain what you mean when you say you felt like that before? Karma does catch up with people, but the best part of karma is that you can build up the positive action by action, and by doing that, you can overwhelm the negative. So, start building!

My Thoughts

I can't forgive my PO for locking me up, detaining me, laughing in my face when I am trying to explain myself. I will never forgive him for that.

(To lifers) I would just say keep yo' head up and don't trip 'cause if you do the crime and you get caught, you got to do the time. If you got snitched on like I am in here, then I feel sorry for you because me hanging around the wrong people I feel bad for you.

I use both (my head and heart). I go with my first mind because that is why I am in here right now and for not going with my heart cost me my freedom for some time, and that messed me up. I can't even see my family for some time.

-Lazarous B5

From The Beat: The reason we put all your writing into one piece is because it looks kind of silly to have three pieces that are each no more than two sentences long! We cannot get a sense of how you feel or what's going on with you when you write such a little bit about three different topics, so please, from now on, take just one topic and write as much as you can about it.

Ridiculous — It's Just A Lil' Weed

I'm sittin' here in B5 juvenile hall SFC. Been here for six days. Went to court today to find out I gotta be another six days, until they find a placement for 30 days. All I wanna do is go trick or treatin' wit' my lil' six-year-old bro. So I'ma continue prayin' that they release me on the 30th!

The whole damn reason I'm here is 'cause I was slangin' pot in Golden Gate Park aka Hippy Hill. I was sittin' in the grass fondling an once of weed and a undercover officer came from behind me and told me to put my hands behind my back.

-Dru B5

From The Beat: We can't argue with you that throwing you in juvie for weed is a stupid waste of taxpayers money. At the same time, ridiculous or not, if the consequences you have to face are the loss of your freedom, then why do it?

Checking Out

Check it out. I'm about to get out of the halls in a few days hoping to never return to this dump. But I'm about to be 18 in a few months and shhh has to be different on moma's, cousin. When I get out, I'm about to start a family and move out of my momma house because I'm about to be on ma grown man shhh, ya dig.

The feds tryin' to take over a ninja block and they got me scared to go back. So as I'm about to be grown, I ain't tryin' to go to the feds because they sending ninjas for the small shhh, and I ain't about to get caught up in that shhh.

To all the young thugs tryin' to be grown, don't grow up too fast because once you get there you wish you could take it back, ya dig. M Beezy's still a boss and a thug, so don't test me because it will get ugly for ya life, ya heard me.

-M Beezy B4

From The Beat: The only "bosses" in this place are the ones that get to go home at the end of the day. Like we said elsewhere, you seem to be struggling between competing interests, both of which cannot be realized. Either you do what you say you're going to do in this piece (and that means not taking your revenge on anyone), or you're going to be pulled back down into the life that puts your body into the hands of this system... only the next stop along the way won't be as sweet as this one! You warn your enemies not to test you, but we wonder whether you're near being able to test yourself. You're right to be scared of going back to the block. We don't think you're ready for the consequences if you do go back... in fact, we don't think anyone is ready until they have to live with the consequences.

I Miss . . .

I miss my money and my homies a lot, but mostly I miss the outs. I miss the block hella much on moma's, but I'm done wit' that shhh. I'm tired of comin' to this grimy place, but I'm stuck right now in the hole tryin' to get out. But it seems I been held down. So I say forget the world — except my family, the block and ma girl.

Ain't nobody there for me except but myself. I love myself and ma homies. Back to the out soon, don't even trip. I love my life me and ma girl. Done with this shhh! We out of here on moma's and ain't turning back across the water to a place where I could start over with my own shhh an' my family.

But I love my life, the hood my family, and money. I'm out here B. Catch me if you can. I'm gone like the wind.

-M Beezy B4

From The Beat: It seems like you're being pulled in two directions. You're tired of this life, but you miss the very thing that defines the life you're tired of: the block! We admire you for loving your life and for declaring that you're "done" with coming back and forth to jail. But we also worry about you, because we know that if you try to stand with one foot in two different worlds, you'll inevitably fall. In a way, you are in limbo... still very close to the life that you say you want to leave behind, while not yet firmly established in the life that you say you want for yourself and your family. That's a particularly difficult and dangerous place to occupy, because it is so easy to fall into temptations by telling yourself it's something little or the last time or... Sometimes, you just have to make a clean break with the past, take a deep breath, and walk into a different future.

BWI Interview With Al Bundy

BWI: How long you been here?
AB: 6 1/2 months.
BWI: How many times?
AB: Twelve!
BWI: Wow!
AB: I know, man.
BWI: Is there anything you can think that could have kept you out of here?
AB: The whole neighborhood — it's negative influence everywhere you go.
BWI: Did you know people your age coming up who didn't get in trouble?
AB: No. Everyone from age 10 and up got into trouble — daddies, uncles, grandmas, everything. People want to go make a name for themselves.
BWI: Are there other ways — positive ways — you could have made a name for yourself? Did you know anyone who made their name by getting their diploma or going to collage — or doing something for someone else?
AB: I do know someone who made a name for himself by playing basketball in high school. He gave us good advice about staying in school. Sometimes, the young kids would say they can't stay in school because they don't have lunch money, and he'd give it to them — him and a few of the other homies. He got locked up with me in my car right now, and people were hella surprised. They were surprised that I got wrapped too, 'cause I'm usually cool.
BWI: What do you want in life?
AB: Something that'll keep my life positive and keep me on the right track. It can be McDonald's or sweeping floors — just whatever will keep me out of trouble.
BWI: How much time are you looking at?
AB: I don't know. I go to court next month. Anything could happen.
BWI: What do you want to happen?
AB: What everybody else wants — drop me case and let me go home. To tell you the truth, I think they're going to try to play me and send me to a program for 18 month.
BWI: If that happens, how will you handle it?
AB: I'll want to run because I can't do no 18 months. But then when I thought about it, I wouldn't want to be on the run, looking over my shoulder, be all paranoid. If push comes to shove, I'll just do it.
BWI: What if you go home?
AB: If I go home it would seem like a dream — take a shower for at least two hours, call my females, hit myself in the face a couple of times to see if it's real.
BWI: How are your going to avoid a return trip?
AB: Go to school! If I was doing homework I wouldn't be out doing what I was doing. I'm not going to say I won't see my homies, but I'm going to stop doing those negative things with them. They're going to see where I'm coming from because they all think I've been here hella long.

-Al-Bundy B5

From The Beat: You're saying all the right things, AB, and we're glad of that. But at the same time, we wonder how you're going to keep the promises that you make here. For example, will you really have the inner strength (which it will take) to stand up to your homies who want to involve you in their little "games" and tell them "No?" (Look at the editor's note in today's Beat.) Saying you won't do those negative things is the right place to start, but it's only a place to start. Actually doing it requires some personal risk and courage. Are you up to it?

A lifetime of memories gone down the drain.

'Hood Art

Let me paint a picture, here's the backdrop
Ninjas on the block with a sock full of rocks
My intuition tells me, here come the cops
First ninja run, last ninja get knocked
A couple of hours later when it's time to get funded
Ten percent of food stamps cost you fo' hundred
I had to use an alias 'cause I'm a most wanted
Now I'm back in the Chevy on the pedal and I'm runnin'.

-De'aries B5

From The Beat: You probably find this kind of action exciting, but we find it sad. You can't even use your own name, you have to pretend to be someone else because of what "they" know about you already. Aren't you tired of it?

Stop Fronting

During ma stay in the halls, I have seen a lot of people that say they got all this shhh, about what they got on the outs. But half of the people that say that are BSing because they want to look good in somebody else's eyes. People need to be theirselves and keep it real.

-Fat Rat B2

From The Beat: We think you're right, Fat Rat, but we also think it's more valuable for you to focus on your own problems — the kinds that put you here — and less on how others conduct themselves.

Why I Can't Forgive

I can't forgive because I don't know no better. I'm from the city. We don't listen. I'm so active, you being so drastic got something for your face, not proactive I'ma pro at this, round globe atlas. Two thumbs up.

-De'aries B5

From The Beat: When are you going to grow out of this nonsense? If you're a pro at this, and the pro ends up a slave (again), then maybe you'll understand why we'd rather remain amateurs... If you don't "know no better," you'd better learn better, otherwise you're almost certainly going to end up a pro on prison life.

I Miss My Dogs: RIPS

We used to post up and smoke weed until we felt like we couldn't get high no more, and talk about gettin' money. Even though you my big homie. I still look at you as my Brah. When you got killed that shhh hurt. Seein' you in that box hurt me. I couldn't deal with that. Damn man, I miss you, Brah.
RIP Tha Fool...

We grew up together running around gettin' high, makin' money. We used to go down and post up, then you started bangin'. Every time I would be drivin' around I would go and pick you up because I didn't like you postin' down there all in the open. I'm sorry I couldn't go to the funeral. I love you brah.
RIP Monte.

Damn man, I would never forget those times we would be out late night slap boxin' and play fightin', and when we had the renter car and went everywhere. When I heard you got killed I wanted to go bad on everybody in here. Damn big brah, I love you and miss you.
RIP Cran-bo.

A lifetime of memories gone down the drain. I like to keep steppin' but I can't get past the pain. This for the homies. See you when I get there.

-Big Bills B5

From The Beat: First of all, BB, we can't imagine carrying around the pain of so many corpses from our lives! We can't imagine what this is doing to your heart and soul, but it can only be described as a national disgrace! We combined these three RIPs into one since they all deal with one topic (though different people). We had to take out all your references to turf and spots as not appropriate for The Beat. What can we say about this terribly sad list of children that are no longer in this world? Only that it represents a monumental failure on the part of so many — their own and that of their killers for a start, but also the environment in which they were raised, the absence of decent role models, and of course, all those OGs who see nothing wrong with putting children like you out into the war zone to be killed! We hate reading pieces like this, especially when we see no evidence that all these deaths have changed the way you look at the world. Every child that is killed like this is connected to people like you who grieve for them and shed tears, and it doesn't matter to us which side of the road they're standing on when they fall. We wish it didn't matter to you...

Love Me Or Not

What's good Beat? How is everybody doing out there? Man, let me get to the point. Love me or not is about how I feel and how my love life because I met this girl. She was the only one who ever told me that she really want me to do my time so I won't and up dead or in jail. Now I wish that I came to do it now.

But I'm really sitting here thinking like, God do things for a reason. I love The Beat but I got to go. Stay down and do good. One love, love me or not.

-Flat Head B5

From The Beat: Of course we love you! If you met a girl who told you to change your ways so that you wouldn't suffer these (or worse) consequences, then you found a girl you can depend on. She's giving you the best advice you could get. Will you follow it?

'Hood Boy

I'm a 'hood boy, don't disrespect it
'Cause if you do, you might get your neck bent
I'm a 'hood boy, don't hate on me
If you do, you might get hit in the teeth
I'm a 'hood boy, fasheezy
But the 'hood don't run me

-Young Kid B1

From The Beat: You say that the 'hood does not run you/But something made you act the foo'/You want respect for your 'hood boy name/But all we can see is terrible shame/Open your eyes and see where you are/You've fallen a bit, but still not that far/The price for a soldier in all these turf wars/Is the loss of your freedom — a life behind bars!

Finding A Part Of Me

Every day, it seems like the days grow longer but my sentence gets shorter. I pray for the day I get set free from this hellhole. I hate the smell of jail and wearing used bras and draw's. Every day it's the same routine. The same messy people finding the same reasons to bellyache.

But I can't help it, being here makes me feel like I'm wanted, like I found a part of me. But still I think of the things that I could have changed in my life to prevent me from ending up in here. But if there is one thing I'm learning from this it's that acting stupid ain't worth it!

-Boniquea GU

From The Beat: Well, sometimes people act stupid so they can put some fun in their life. It's okay to act stupid to have fun... as long as you do not do anything illegal that will get you caught up. If the only way you know how to have fun is to do the things that bring you here, then you need to learn to amuse yourself in ways that don't carry such serious and negative consequences. We are interested in exactly what you meant when you wrote that you feel like being here makes you feel wanted. Do you mean you feel more loved inside the hall than you do in freedom? If so, something is upside down in your life!

Never Forgive

The reason that I can't never forgive because someone killed two people. He was close to me. They wasn't family, but they was someone I grew up with since I was little. I ain't gonna forgive him, and that's one of the things why I can't forget.

-Rethey B2

From The Beat: We can understand why forgiving someone for killing loved ones would be a very hard thing to do. But at the same time, the anger that you carry around with you can leave you feeling sick while doing nothing to the person you can't forgive.

Why I Can't Forgive The Police

Why I can't forgive the police because they are very mean. Also, they don't like these black people that roam the streets at night. The police don't like people that are in a more then two-person group. They think that they are a gang.

I also can't forgive the police because they let my cousin die. If it was a police that was dying, they will call the paramedics fast. But it had took the ambulance 25 minutes to come, and he had died on the scene

-Menace B4

From The Beat: If what you say is true about the police not calling an ambulance in time to save your cousin, you're right to be angry. Too often, the police are just like y'all... they value one of their own "boys" but they don't value yours. You value your own boys, but you don't value theirs. How can we move to a place where we all recognize that we (whoever "we" are) are not worth more than them (whoever "they" are), and that they are not worth more than us?

Lil' Miss Young

The person I really care 'bout is ma lil sis Rosey. Me and her went through so much shhh... and I just met her when she got up in here. I got in a fight 'cause of her, but its coo' 'cause I still love her. She keeps it solid wit' everyone and she just barely a teen. She look like she 'bout grown, and she is. She gonna always be ma lil' solid female till tha day we die. Keep yo' head up when I leave and don't ever let no female underestimate you. Love you.

-White Chocolate GU

From The Beat: You really have a lot of good friends (lil' sisters) in here, don't you White Chocolate? You must be a very friendly type.

Why Is It Messy?

People in the hall is messy. They're older than me and still acting young and so immature. Why do so-called grown people act so young... three, four, five years old! That's a shame you got to be so childish to get through and talk about people to get through life. Ma granny say when you talk about people, that means your not happy Tell me, why is the hall so messy?

-Nay B GU

From The Beat: Because juvenile hall is not a place where anyone wants to be — and nobody takes pride in living here and keeping it neat and clean. Of course, there is one way to not to be bothered by the mess: when you get out, stay out.

A Dream

I start to dream, I dream of you...
Will I wake up to your touch anytime soon?
When will we hold each others hands?
When will I get to see my man?
I get to hear your voice at night.
You and the kids are one of the three things that make me all right.
I don't get to hear your voice that long,
but even then you keep me strong.
I have our picture on the wall,
but I get mad every time I see it fall.
I love you so and miss you much,
I long to feel your loving touch.
I know in the past I did mess up,
But now I'm here to tell you I will not give up.

-LaRonda GU

From The Beat: We're sure you know how luck you are to have someone out there who loves you and is waiting for you to get it together, so that you can get back out into the free world where you can spread your wings and fly!

You Already Know

I'm gonna keep it real with everybody here. I am tired of people always having something to say! Whether it's from people in yo' business or people wanting to know yo' business, but people already know what's up! So next time people see me, they know where I be, so keep it real. Always stay solid to your true new girl, but nowhere near old. But I'm about to go 'cause I'm 'bout to catch fade, but always remember I am keeping it real!

-Lil' Miss Y GU

From The Beat: Now, let us keep it real: We don't find much of importance in this piece, to be honest. You haven't really said anything more than "keep it real." What does that mean to you? Does keeping it real mean you'll be coming back to this place? Does it mean that you don't plan to change anything in your life? Does it mean that you've done any thinking at all since you've been here that might lead you away from here and keep you free? From what you've written, we have no idea what the answers to any of these questions might be.

My Letter To a Lifer

If I was a lifer, I would just have to kill myself, because life in jail... I can't do that. You can't see yo' girl, yo' family or see anything. That ain't coo', so while you locked up, think about what you do, 'cause if you keep coming back to jail yo' life gon be based on it.

If you had to do life in jail, what would you do in jail for life? You can't beat everybody up. You might become somebody's "toy" and get raped in yo' room. Den what are you really going to do? Mostly everybody in there is bigger than you and you can't do a thing about it, but just take it like a man. Where I come from we separate the boys from the men.

-Man Man B4

From The Beat: The advice you give — to think about what you're doing — is the best advice to follow. But that business about killing yourself is just not how it goes down (usually). When it comes down to it, life will (almost) always seem more precious than death. Even though you don't think you could do it, the truth is, human beings can adapt to almost any environment to stay alive. (We hope you never have to test this theory!) As far as taking it "like a man," we never know what is meant by that phrase. How does "a man" take getting raped? How does "a man" do his time when that's the only thing he's doing in life? When you "separate the boys from the men," how do you decide who goes into which category? Anyway, the time to think about all this is BEFORE you end up in that situation.

Brain Vs Heart

Like when it comes to brain vs heart, that vicious 'cause when it's beef, you mostly use your brain. But a ninja like me use both 'cause I use my brain when I am hustling. But when I hear about one of my ninjas getting whacked, ya feel me, I use my heart.

I take it to the heart, ya boy with this hyphy head bustin' movement so I gotta use my brain and heart. But when it come to females, I don't use my heart. Really though I am one of them ninjas who just go off. The people I have problems with, I already know they gone get off, so I get off first. So I guest it the brain, ya dig.

-Lando Boy B2

From The Beat: What exactly do you mean by that last line? When you talk about getting out before those you're having problems with, we hope you're not plotting to do something to them, because if you are, then you have told us that you're not using your brain! If you're one of those people who "just go off," then you're also going to be one of those people who ends up being told when to sleep, eat, speak and what to do and not do by a bunch of strangers, just like you are now!

I'm Out

Yeah, this Jaleace in jail for four months. They finally letting me out, feel me. If this is in The Beat, I'm already gone, but no telling. Y'all know how the Beat be playing. But y'all should do right in here 'cause dat get look at too. But I'm done wit' "You got caught," tired of DRBs, slidin' it around an dat "keep it down" and dat "talk dead" right when I be n the middle of saying some talk dead. But they can't hold y'all forever but, shhh, they can keep ya for long.

-Cash Money GU

From The Beat: If you're reading this, Jaleace, congratulations! Hope we won't see you again in the halls.

Dear Death Row Inmate

Well, that's the life they gave you, but personally, I don't like it 'cause I think you're no different from any other person. Sitting here writing this letter to you, I'm in a better place than you. Knowing how I feel about being in here, I know you feel ten times worse!

Looking back on the things you did, I know how it is when you just don't give a damn, right? ... But I like the fact that you can continue your life and not... Some people hold their head to the ground in shame, but I feel no matter what you did you should hold y'all head up. I know it's easy for me to say that, and harder for you to do. But damn, "life" is a long time...

Do you have any pride? I can't imagine what you're going through...

In not too long I'm 'bout to go back into my box, somewhere I don't want to go back... Don't have too much of a choice... These halls are driving me crazy...

-McFa GU

From The Beat: We are very, very sorry, but we just could not read what you wrote. Several Beat staff spent quite a lot of time trying to read your handwriting, but this is the best we could do without spending many more hours (which we just don't have time for). Even your Beat name was not clear to us, so we apologize if we got that wrong, too. Please, please take a little more time with your writing so that we can type it and publish it. It's terrible to spend the amount of time you spent writing two full pages (thanks!), only to see a few paragraphs "translated" onto the page. But what we could read, it sounds like it would be a good letter to receive for someone facing life or death in prison.

I'll Never Forgive

What it do Beat? It's ya boy, M Beezy, and I'm still here up in B4 holding it down with some of ma ninjas. But I ain't trippin'.

But I will never forgive the ninjas who killed my homies from the block because I grew up with them, and it's different in the world without them. So every time I see them ninjas from the other side, it's on sight, ya dig.

But a real ninja like me gone do me all the way till the day I die. RIP to all my lost homies. I will never forgive the ninjas who took these souls. It's on sight family.

-M Beezy B4

From The Beat: By announcing that "it's on sight" for the revenge you're plotting, you entirely undermine your earlier claim that you're tired of coming here and plan to do what you have to do to stay out. This is a prescription for ending your own life — if freedom means anything to you. Can you understand that those who are left to grieve for their dead friends on "the other side" see the world exactly the same way you do? Can you understand that their world is also different now that their friends are gone? Can you understand that to each other, you are both "the other side?" Can you understand that not forgiving is one thing, but that taking revenge is quite another? All your desires to change, all your desperate wishes to get out of here forever, all of your plans to keep yourself from the impotence you're now experiencing to change anything — all of that goes up in smoke if you act out your "us vs. them" scenario. We only hope this is a lesson that you learn before it gets to that point.

The Beat Within Interviews Young Harlem

TBW: Afternoon, Young Harlem.
YH: Hi.
TBW: This is your interview. We can choose any topic you'd like to talk about today. What would you like to talk about? You choose.
YH: My girl.
TBW: Okay, great. Why don't you tell us about her?
YH: I wanna write about how she made me mad.
TBW: Okay. What happened? How did she make you angry?
YH: She ran away from Walden House like a dumb ass. She got caught. She went back to juvenile. I can't talk to her, 'cause she gone for a minute. But when I get back home, I'm gonna be back with the jump off. I'm gonna get it crackin'.
TBW: When you're both free again, what do you hope happens?
YH: I 'm gonna get off probation. Have her around my family so she won't get in trouble.
TBW: When you're both home, does she stay with you?
YH: No, she stay with her mom, but when I get home, I'm gonna stay at her home for awhile, get to know her mother and sister.
TBW: So you're serious about this girl?
YH: Yes.
TBW: What do you hope happens for you both in your futures? How do you influence each other? What do you encourage each other to do?
YH: We have a better life. I'm a take care of my son.
TBW: She has your son?
YH: Yeah, in her stomach.
TBW: So she's pregnant?
YH: Yes.
TBW: And she's going to have a boy? You two already know that?
YH: Yes.
TBW: Congratulations! That's so exciting! When is your baby due?
YH: January.
TBW: That's so amazing! Do you have a name for him picked out already?
YH: She's saying she wants to name him after me.
TBW: How do you feel about that?
YH: I don't know.
TBW: What do you want to name him?
YH: Lamarie Johnson.
TBW: What a beautiful name. Do you think your baby mama will like that name?
YH: I don't know.
TBW: Will you all stay together when you get out and the baby's born?
YH: Yeah.
TBW: Where do you want to live?
YH: Out of the area. Fairfield.
TBW: How are you going to manage with a new family and all?
YH: I'm gonna go to Treasure Island Academy. Then, after I graduate, I'm gone to City College. I'm gonna graduate from there. Probably get into construction.
TBW: Terrific. You can do it. What about your lady? What do you want for her?
YH: I plan for her to go to school, too.
TBW: What about your baby?
YH: My auntie's gonna take care of the baby.
TBW: What else do you want for your family?
YH: One more kid. Spend time with Durante and Cash Money (two friends down at the Ranch.)
TBW: What do you hope for your kids?
YH: Think positive. Go to school, graduate, be successful.
TBW: In what way do you hope they'll be successful?
YH: Not to be in the same predicament I'm in.
TBW: What predicament are you in?
YH: Being locked up, being away from my family. Only being able to talk to my family once a week. Not being able to be with the people I love.
TBW: So do you want your kids to stay off the streets?
YH: Yeah.
TBW: How will you keep them away from the streets?
YH: Have 'em doin' sports, have 'em doin' something that they like. Keep their minds off the streets.
TBW: Does that mean that you'll have to stay out of the streets?
YH: Yeah.
TBW: Is that going to be a big deal for you, to stay off the streets once you're out of here?
YH: No.
TBW: Well, it sounds like you've really thought this through, Young Harlem. You always write such beautiful poems to your lady. You seem like you're going to be very happy. You're obviously already very happy!
YH: Yeah!

-Young Harlem LCRS

From The Beat: Nice interview, Young Harlem. It's great to get to know you. So far we've only gotten to know your tender heart through your poems. You sound excited about the arrival of your baby son and you're making some concrete plans to care for him and your baby mama. Now that you're about to have a family who will be depending on you, there may be many things you seriously won't be able to risk, such as your freedom. Your son won't need a daddy who's inside. Are you prepared for that? We hope so!

Listen

Sitting up in here feeling hella mad
Feeling like I'm 'bout to go bad
Bein' up in dis place that I don't wanna be
Wish dat I could get out fa free
But don't trip, I'ma flip tha script
And in two days I'm out dis crypt
So I hope everybody dat's locked up
Get out and don't do tha something dat
made you mess up

-White Chocolate GU

From The Beat: We hope you will listen to your own advice and don't mess up when you get out. You know how you messed up to get in here, so you also know how you can stop messing up to stay out of here. Freedom is precious, so cherish it!

Brain Vs Heart

In all my situations, my brain may work before my heart. When something is wrong my brain automatically knows. If it does too wrong, heart starts to ask questions. Nothing wrong, calm down, but my heart still with eyes and gets hot and starts to beat faster.

Another question, I thought it was okay now it's getting… Calm down! Brain starts to get confused itself knowing things have gone bad. My body's now into effect because my heart beating two beats for a normal one, face is getting red, meditatingly rocking, unnoticeable because I've lost control and my heart now not only know but it's in the beginning of about to hurt… and hurt bad.

-Kendrick GU

From The Beat: Are you saying that the things your brain tells you to do causes your heart to feel pain? If so, how can you bring these two critical parts of who you are together to act in your best interests? What kind of control can you exercise over your brain to minimize these painful experiences?

Crack Cocaine

Hi, my first name is Crack, last name Cocaine.
I like to ease people's pain,
but in the process I mess with your brain
and sometimes I even drive people insane.
Isn't that great, isn't that grand?
Sometime I even burn people's hands.
I spend my time inside a glass pipe…
You add brealow and then the light.

-LaRonda GU

From The Beat: We definitely think this is a beginning of a great piece, LaRonda, but only the beginning. Why did you stop writing? There is a lot more you can say. Most people who have never tried crack don't realize how quickly it hooks you and just how low you can fall when you are hooked. You could spit a lot of knowledge here. (And by the way, what is brealow?)

Kendrick

My favorite person in tha world is ma lil' sis Kendrick. We both up in juvenile hall together. Yeah, I know dat's a shame, but we both learning our lessons. I been up in here for two months and she 'bout almost been up in here for a month.

My sis keeps it real wit' you. She makes me laugh and I'm her laugh of the day. She cried today so I instantly made her laugh. I'm 'bout to get out, but she got to do some more time. So when she get out, we gonna kick it fo' real. Keep yo' head up sis. I love you.

-White Chocolate GU

From The Beat: Well, we wish both you and your sister well. (Is she really your sister, or is that just how you think of each other?) We hope you really meant it when you said that both of y'all are learning your lesson. What are the lessons you're both learning? Just keep this in mind: there are people out there also affected by your actions and their consequences.

I Hate It Here

I'm tired of waking up to the same shhh every day. The staff playin' us for time just so they don't have to worry about us. They claim to be counselors but they really don't care. That's how I see it. Sometimes I think some of tha staff are prejudice, because a staff gave a certain race burritos and didn't give no other races shhh.

-Young Da-Da B5

From The Beat: If staff is operating from their prejudices, then they aren't acting any differently then those they are supposed to counsel. Are you condemning all the staff, or just some? If you were staff in B5, how would you do it? (How many times have you been here? So, how much could you hate it?)

Forgiving

I can forgive people. I have been forgiving people all my life. In a way, that's a good thing. But then again, it can be bad because when certain people know that you are a forgiving person, they start to take your kindness for a weakness. They will abuse the fact that you're that type of person. For whatever the case may be, people will abuse you. For instance my mom wasn't at my first court date.

-Forgiving Person B4

From The Beat: We understand what you mean when you say certain people will always take advantage of your good heart. But that's on them. You can't change the way others behave toward you, but only the way you behave toward them. We applaud you for being the forgiving person you are, even if it sometimes causes you trouble. Can you explain why your mom not coming to your first court is an example of someone abusing your forgiving nature?

Steel Heart

Me, I use ma heart, for the simple fact that my heart pumps more than ma brain thinks. I'm not sayin' dat I can't think, I'm just sayin' dat a real ninja like me got a solid heart dat will go hard. The more I use my heart the better I could think , 'cause it gives me dat adrenaline rush, and dat's when a real ninja like me go harder than the average.

I like to deal wit' my emotions more than my thoughts 'cause my heart can stir up good and bad emotions that can 'cause ma heart to go good or bad. If it came to the end and I had to pick out the smartest brain or the biggest heart, I would pick the biggest heart because I see it like your heart can make you think more 'cause of the realness that comes from da heart. Basically, I got a lot of heart.

-Darius B4

From The Beat: Are you saying that using your heart makes you harder? How is that? Does your heart ever hurt from what you see or what you do? Does a hurting heart make you soft? What do you think of people whose emotions (heart) lets them feel the pain of others? Do you have a heart like that?

Sitting In Jail

I'm sittin' in jail
Oh man, this place feels like hell
I'm thinking to myself when this is going to end
My PO sitting here trying to send me to placement
To me, I feel it'll be better sitting locked in a basement
I'm sitting in class
Can't wait to go outside and hit the pavement
I'm sitting in jail
Oh man, females now already raising hell
Man, I can't even began to tell you...
I sit and I sit
Thinking of the times I would harm myself
Thinking I don't even know what I feel
I'm looking at my wounds
Wishing my body was made of steel
Man, I can't even tell you how it is sitting in jail or how I feel
Well, must I continue on how I feel
That's if you are willing to sit and hear...

-Jeannie GU

From The Beat: There is no need to tell us how is feels in jail, Jeannie. We have worked with many, many youngsters who have been there, and many of us who work at The Beat have experienced jail (including MUCH worse places than YGC). Just stay strong. Hard times will be over soon, and then come the even harder times because that's when you need to face your problems squarely and don't run away from them. Whenever you feel like you need to let something out, pick up a pencil and let it out on paper. The Beat will always have an ear to listen and a shoulder you can lean on.

Clock

Looking at the time got me in shock
On how long I been on lock
Tired of being in jail wearing these holy-moly socks
Remember the time I was calling shots
Bang bang, pop pop, dat's what you hear when you come through my block
So that's all I can say when I look at the clock
Oh man, it's about 8:00 o'clock
Hot dog diggidy damn, I got slide by

-Cash Money GU

From The Beat: What else did looking at time passing make you think about? What are you going to do (and not do) when you get back to that block with all the violence going on there?

The Beat Homies

I want to show my appreciation to my Beat Within homies Pauline and Mike Kroll for taking their time to kick it with us once a week. I probably won't see Mike no more, so I just want to thank him for being so coo' wit' me when I was in the halls. I wanna let him know that I'm doing good at Log Cabin and I hope he's doing good, too.

And my girl, Pauline. She's been real nice and supportive ever since I met her on the first time I came to The Beat at Log Cabin. And my boy, NGO wit' The Beat.

Now, so you know, I got love for The Beat. Take care, y'all.

-Frank LCRS

From The Beat: You're so welcome, Frank. We're glad you're doing well down at the Ranch, doing your program. There are many counselors down at the Ranch, we hope you get to know them and learn from them what they know about life.

What Makes Me

What makes me
Do my hair make me long, short, bold, none of all
What makes me
My confidence, strength, loveliness, kindness and self-respect for me and sometimes others
What makes me
Fake people, messy females, two faced girls, the ones that stab you in your back and the ones that smile in yo' face and talk behind yo' back and even more
What makes me
I make me, my personality make me, my self-esteem make me, me being me make me loud, funny racket, interesting and energetic
KINDNESS, LOVING MAKES ME ME
BEING ME MAKES ME, AND NOBODY ELSE MAKES ME

-Nay B GU

From The Beat: Okay, so you've told us what makes you and what doesn't make you... but you haven't told us what you are. What have you made yourself into?

To Whoever May Read This

I've been hurt in the past. I've been hurt to the point where my wounds will never heal. That's something I can't forget. That person is someone I can never forgive. I can't forgive that person because of what they've done... what they have done to me. They didn't care of no one feelings when they hurt my feelings, so why should I forgive, why should I forget? One day I may forgive, one day, I may forget.

-Young Meeze B2

From The Beat: Here's one possible answer to your question of why you should forgive others, even when they never gave you a thought when they hurt your feelings — it is to show that you are made of something better, that you are not the same as those who hurt you. What would it take for that "one day" that you may forgive or forget to come about?

What Keeps Me Up At Night?

Man, what keeps me up at night? Man, I be thinking about when the hell I'm gone get out of here. when my grandma come visit every day, it be hitting me hard when I go in my room and sometimes I cry.

What else keeps me up is when I think about my nieces. I really think about my nieces because I don't want them to follow my footsteps. I want them to be safe.

And last but not least, I be thinking like do God be answering my prayers

-M Lene GU

From The Beat: We know it's hard being in here. Just take this time as a time to reflect on your life and where it is heading. (Maybe having this time to reflect is exactly the answer to your prayers that God has given you.) Thinking about what you need to do to change and how this change is going to come about would be the best thing you could do as a role model for those innocent nieces of yours.

Lisa

Ma main girl is Lisa. I just met tha girl 'bout two weeks ago. She tell me so much shhh dat I can relate. I feel like she ma lil sis. I love her like a sis I never had, and on tha outs best believe I'ma be dere for her. She also keeps it real just like ma otha sis do, an' I suggest you don't mess wit' her. Keep yo head up, sis, and look past these messy a females.

-White Chocolate GU

From The Beat: Well, this is your second piece about another female in your unit that you relate to as a sister. We're glad you can relate to people in here as sisters — and we hope that you act like sisters on the outs, meaning keeping each other out of trouble!

Hey!

I got my mind made up, but I can't make a decision. How the hell you find more shhh to be angry about in jail, than when you was out at home? These cats here ain't worth the ammo. Not worth being called enemies. But I got enough ammo to last 'til I leave here and never see you in the streets? You understand the metaphor? This ain't a threat, this to let you know that I could let you have it however you want. I don't sweat y'all, man. I'm out. Y'all know me, though, that Brooklyn born bathing ape.

-Biggie Littles LCRS

From The Beat: Sounds like you are so tired of the endless soap opera that goes on at such places like camp/ranch. A question for you why do you waste your words on those you could care less about?? Why don't you use your words to educate others? You have the skills!

Tired Of This Place

I'm tired of this place fa real. I can't even sleep in here, and when I do go to sleep it seem like 30 minutes later they comin' to wake me up. Man, I really hate jail fa real. Even when you try to be strong, once you get in that box it's all bad 'cause you start venturing off to what you could be doing with your time instead of wasting it.

-Tha Kid B5

From The Beat: You're supposed to hate jail. It's designed that way. But the test of how much you truly hate this place is whether or not you come back. If you go back to the streets and do the same things that led you here before, then you really don't hate this place very much since you're giving the system all the power they need to put you right back. They say that talk is cheap, so show us what you're really going to do.

I Couldn't Ask My Mom

When I was young, I couldn't ask my mom for a lot of things.

-Donte B1

From The Beat: It took you one hour to write this? Come on, Donte, you can do better. For example, can you tell us why you couldn't talk to your mom about a lot of things? Can you tell us what kind of things you wish you could have talked to her about? Can you tell us if you can talk to her about these things now? There are many things you could have added to this one sentence to make it a better piece.

My Ninjas Can't Live Their Lives No More

I can't forgive the ninjas that killed my ninja, Monte, and Ant, because my ninjas can't live their lives no more. My ninja, Monte, got a lil' girl, but now he not here. She have to grow up without her daddy. Ninjas just need to stop hatin'. Ninjas just mad, 'cause Monte and Ant was out there eatin', and they wasn't.

I'm 'bout to end this. I just want to say RIP to my ninjas and let them know they gone, but never forgotten. Thug In Peace. (TIP) Monte and Ant. We all we got.

-Mike B1

From The Beat: Like we said before, peace is not a part of the thug picture. If you want peace, then give up the life of crime and war. We're very sorry about Ant and Monte, but they are not different from every single life that has been lost to these wars. There is always someone like you left to grieve and shed tears and not forgive... Maybe a little forgiveness would change this deadly game.

An Interview With Darnell

D: I'm one of those ninjas that don't use they heart, 'cause I don't have no heart, just brain. Yeah, I use my brain, more than my heart.
TBW: You don't seem like you're too happy without your heart, Darnell. What happened to your heart?
D: It died.
TBW: How did it die? What happened?
D: The hood took it.
TBW: You mean Marin City took it?
D: Yeah.
TBW: So you got in trouble?
D: Yeah.
TBW: Why else do you have a hole in your heart?
D: 'Cause the world turned its back on me.
TBW: Who in your world has turned its back on you?
D: Family, friends, school. I got kicked out of two schools.
TBW: So when you got in trouble, nobody came through for you?
D: My mom, that's it.
TBW: Well, that's cool that she was there for you.
D: She always been there for my court dates, my school meetings, everything.
TBW: But she's the only one who stands up for you?
D: My mom, my brother—they're cool. But some of my family is fake. Half the world is fake.
TBW: Who's fake?
D: Some ninjas say somethin' behind your back, some ninjas is scary when they tryna act like they're not.
TBW: How are they really scary?
D: If there's about to be a fight, they run. They act like they tough, but they run.
TBW: So if your enemies run away, you lose respect for them?
D: Yeah.
TBW: But if they stand up, even if you beat them, you have respect for them for not running away?
D: Yeah.
TBW: Who do you respect?
D: Most of my ninjas. My brother, my mom. My cousins, my aunties. I don't have friends, I have associates.
TBW: It sounds like your heart's been broken, that you can't trust anyone any more.
D: I don't know.

-Darnell

From The Beat: Definitely sounds like your heart has been broken. When that happens it's tempting to withdraw your heart, but instead of closing it, can you just give it a rest? Let it heal? Can you just stay quiet and watch people? See who you can trust in what situations? When someone talks trash about you, or snitches you out, how can you deal with it that doesn't involve physical violence? We hope the day will come soon when your heart will be functioning to full capacity again. We also hope you can see beyond the hood, 'cause from what you state, the only thing worthy from the hood is your mom, everything else should be cut loose.

Dear Death Row Inmate,

This is Oscar. I got twelve days in juvenile hall. I am writing to you to say, "Keep your head up, no matter what the situation is and don't let nothing get you down. Just think and pray to God that some day He will forgive you and forgive whoever does this to you. Don't forget, you always be remembered."

-Oscar

From The Beat: What a good-hearted (on topic)letter you've written to someone on death row. It's horrible when anyone suffers, including and maybe especially someone on death row. It's wonderful that you have sympathy.

I'm The Unforgiven

Why the person can't forgive me is because I broke in her house and I asked her, can she forgive me? She said no. An' it happened when I got out of the halls, and I came back in a few hours. It happened in the hood, and I had a month in the halls. How I got caught? Somebody snitched.

-This Boy

From The Beat: You are definitely still a young child, when you actually think that you can walk into someone house and demand they forgive you. You truly need to think things through before reacting. This way of handling things will only get you into further trouble.

Letter To A Lifer

If I could write a letter to a man or woman in jail for life, I would ask a lot of questions. I would really want to know how they stay sane and go on every day without giving up on everything and life. I would ask what they do to pass the time.

-A young detainee

From The Beat: Those are very good questions. Do you think it might be tricky asking a lifer personal questions without hurting his or her feelings? Some lifers try to stay attached to the outside world; others get more involved in their own drama in the prison.

Be Real

Be real to live life
Be real to have ice
Be real to live right
Have faith and get out

-Henny

From The Beat: When you say, "Be real to have ice" we guess you mean diamonds, not crystal meth, right? How, according to you, does someone or do you "live right"? What do you have faith in?

Thanks To God For Keeping Me Alive

What up? This yo' boy, Jonny. I have a couple more weeks in La Juvenile. Le doy gracias a dios for tenerme vivo en serrado pero con mucha salud. Un saludo a todos mis amigos. (I give thanks to God for keeping me alive—locked up, but in good health. Greetings to my friends.) Remember be stronger. When you get out be smart, don't be stupid. Think with your heads. Thanks for letting me be in your Beat. Remember, peace out! I love you, mon. see you soon!

-Jonny

From The Beat: You sound like you have both a good heart and head. We hope you take your own very wise advice, once you're out of juvy again, and stay strong, smart and free.

Obsessed With Getting Out

Every minute I'm constantly thinking, "When am I getting out?"

-Ariz

From The Beat: Once out, what must you do to stay out?

I Rely On My Brain

I use my brain because with the brain, I can think about the things I want to do. If something happens wrong or right, it doesn't matter, but you have to use your brain to do things right. And the only things I can use is when something goes wrong and I have to use my feelings from the heart and not from the brain. Those are my reasons about my heart and my brain.

-Chucky

From The Beat: Do you mean that you use your heart when something goes wrong because it's your heart, with its sympathy, that knows how to make things right? That makes sense. Your brain can figure complicated things out. It sounds like you're using both together in ways that work well for you.

I Could Never Handle Doing Life

What's up? Is it hard being in prison for hella deep? I could never handle doing life in the pen. My dad went to prison for six years and it seemed like he was gone for way longer than that.

-Justin

From The Beat: Sadly, by poor choices, many men and women find themselves doing life in prison and hopefully adjusting. When your dad went to prison, did you write him? Did your family keep in touch with him? When he was free, what did he tell you about what being inside was like for him? What have you learned from your father?

My Mom Gave Me Up

I can't forgive my mom for giving me up, because if I was with her I would not be inside juvenile hall writing this letter right now. But I love my mom with all of my heart, but I cannot forgive my mom.

-Jeremy

From The Beat: time heals wounds and hopefully that will be the case with your mother. We hope in due time the two of you can sort things out.

WALDEN HOUSE PSK weekly writings

Brain Vs. Heart

I usually in the past have acted with my heart. I've never thought about the consequences, ever, and now I'm paying the price. My emotions took over my body and soul, and I acted on it without thinking. Now that I'm sober for a while, I act more with my brain. My heart gets the best of me every once in a while, but I am trying to think about things before I act on them.

-Ashley

From The Beat: We don't think your heart got the better of you; we think chemicals got the better of you, and chemicals scramble the circuits in that amazing computer we all have called a brain. The other ingredient of your heart-over-head actions have to do with childhood. As children, we all act without regard for the future, for consequences, or really for much more than our own instant gratification. Maturity brings a sense of ourselves in relation to others and the world, and provides a perspective we lacked as children. So, we think the combination of your clear thinking brought about by sobriety and your ability to take stock of your life and make serious plans for the future brought about by growing up is a combination that promises a far brighter future than you might have predicted for yourself a year ago... Keep that clear mind working for you!

Forgive? Never

Why forgive? It's pointless. Once a back stabber always a back stabber... two-face... If it's one thing I learned, it's loyalty. Stay true to the to da game. Never bite the hand that fed you. Never mess nobody over. It just ain't right. Someone somewhere obviously trust you enough with something, keep it at that. Man ya heard.

-Crackhead

From The Beat: Yeah, we heard, and what we heard doesn't impress us! You say you've learned loyalty, but we see no loyalty to yourself, only to others who've laid down rules ("the game") that you've just accepted and followed, right into trouble. You write, "Never mess nobody over," but you've done a pretty good job of messing yourself over, so how does your advice apply to your life? As for forgiveness, all we can tell you is that holding onto the emotions that prevent you from forgiving do more to hurt you than any of the people who are the objects of that emotion.

He Did Me Smirkish

The reason why I can't forgive is because he did me smirkish. I fell in love with him. The only dude that I stayed faithful to. I got wrapped up a lot more than once. The last time he said he was done with all the drama. He did it moving and said he was coo'. I swear me and my baby was on some Bonnie and Clyde type stuff.

It's like damn, it's that one. You just gon do it moving on ya girl like that. I was so in love with him. I carved his name in my forearm. I really loved him. Bo-Boi is what I use to call him, and to keep it real, I miss him a lot.

-Jazz'ah Belle

From The Beat: If you were "on some Bonnie and Clyde type stuff," then we're glad the two of you are no longer running together. B & C had their lives cut short in a barrage of bullets, so it's not a model we like to celebrate. Also, if he left you because he was tired of the drama, then you should have taken that as a sign that it's time to stop the drama. It sounds to us like he woke up, smelled the coffee, and decided he wanted to stay in this world as a free man. Now, that's a model we do like to celebrate!

Dear Lifer

Keep your head up always no matter what happens. If I want to know about anybody I would ask, "Why did you do that? Why did you take something and how do you feel? What would you do if you could go back to that same picture? Would you still do it if you had another chance?" If you do, keep your head up.

-Peaches And Cream

From The Beat: It sounds to us that this letter could just as easily go to you or anyone else in the system, whether they're lifers or not. How would you answer some of your own questions?

CANON BARCUS COMMUNITY HOUSE

From The Beat: About two years ago we started a workshop around the corner from our office. We met some incredible kids at the Canon Barcus Community House, but they were revamping their programs and somehow we got lost in the loop. Well, their programs are up and running again and they asked about The Beat. And we're so glad they did because we truly missed them. These are kids that could easily be on the verge of doing time, but instead they rise above the odds and share a little something with us. Their ages range from fourteen to nineteen and they really have great things to say. But don't take our word for it, keep reading and formulate your own opinions.

An Introduction

My name is Karla. I'm 15 years old, I go to John 'O Connell High School. I live with my mom, her boyfriend, my little brother and sister. I have six brothers and sisters and two more step-sisters.

-Karla

From The Beat: That's a good start, but now we want to know more. How does being the oldest child in the household make you feel? Do you have to do a lot for your little brother and sister? Would you say you're a good older sister? If you could do anything you wanted right now, what would you do? Hopefully, we can get you to write more next time because we really want to get to know you.

Think Free

To be free, I bet you guys who have the hard life don't think I know what it really is. But let me tell you what I know what freedom is to me. Freedom to me is knowing that out of five million people you were born. So to me you were born free. The way you go through life you get mental freedom. Back to my point is the only person who stops you from being free is you. So for me teaching people how to think free is my freedom.

-Emmanuel

From The Beat: That's a pretty deep piece right there. What does it look like when someone is not free in there thinking? And with laws, rules, and all that other stuff, can anybody in the world be fully honest when saying they think freely? Where do you think most people get their ideas? And how did you get to a place where you could teach others how to think free? Hell, we want to learn...

Thanksgiving Poem

Thanksgiving is coming up and it's going to be fun, I'm getting ready to go to the crib and grub on something yum. I'm going to eat everything that I can — turkey, greens, potatoes and yams. I'm going to see my family, we're going to celebrate after that we're going to get a hot plate.

After dinner its dessert time and my combo is ice cream and apple pie, after all of that I'm going to go back to the crib, go to bed, kick back, and watch The Simpsons. The next Thanksgiving celebration I go to I'm going to be making the food because I ate at the first one!!

-Dominic

From The Beat: This is a great Thanksgiving tribute. In fact it's so good you're making us hungry all over again and we would only do that if you knew how to paint pictures with your words. We're thankful you have that ability. Besides food, what else are you thankful for? Do you have a good family? Is your health okay? What about school? I'm sure we're all thankful for Thanksgiving dinner, but what else are you thankful for?

Remember Me

I have never been hypnotized by any women's eyes before. They have always said that the eyes are the windows to the soul. When we had our first date and I had looked through your eyes. I knew that I was with an angel because I saw heaven in your soul.

On our first date do you remember how cold it was that night? I don't remember if it was cold or not. I just remember that when I had you for those three to four hours. It felt that time had stopped just for us.

I thank god for him letting me meet and get to know you. I'm not saying goodbye but I am saying good luck and never give up on your dreams. I will see you again but until then I just ask you to remember me.

-Emmanuel

From The Beat: You are a very mature individual for your age. Not a lot of adults can humbly ask the one they love to remember them without getting all hurt inside. Without pleading for them to come back. And yet you do it with so much compassion and understanding. How did you get so advanced with matters of the heart?

My Intro

My name is LB. I'm from Frisco my parents are from Nicaragua. I play soccer, go to school trying to get my G.E.D. I'm going to try to get my license, I'm a Latino male trying to do something with my life and trying to show people that I can do something.

-LB

From The Beat: We really respect that last sentence because it sounds like you're determined. However, forget what everyone else says, you don't have to show anyone anything. You have a lot of potential and can go far if you put in the work. What do you plan on doing after you get your GED? College? Work? What's next for LB?

Cuando Venía Para Acá

Lo que me mantiene dispierto es que voy para Honduras y no sé que va a pasar. Si Dios quiere pasaré la Navidad allá y Enero también. Ojalá sea buen viaje como otras veces en el tren.

Cuando venía hacía acá y veo el tren me siento feliz que viene me alegre. Se siente como un rey cuando saltas de uno a otro. También es emosionante que te persiga la migra y otras autoridades ver que no me pueden alcanzar.

From The Beat: No creemos que sea muy feliz si te llegaras a caer de un tren y perdieras una de tus piernas o tu vida. Esto ya le ha pasado a mucho y tú bien lo sabes. Busca la manera como vivir una vida fuera de peligro. Con esta carta nos das a entender que te gusta el peligro y eso está muy mal.

When I Was Coming Over Here

What keeps me awake at night is that I am going to Honduras and I don't know what is going to happen. If God's willing, I'll spend Christmas, as well as January, over there. Hopefully it's a good trip like other times on the train.

When I was coming over to these parts and I saw the train, I felt so happy that it's coming that it fills me with joy. You feel like a king when you jump from one to the other. Also, it is very emotional if you're being chased by the immigration police and for other authorities to see that they cannot reach me.

-El Catracho Loco

From The Beat: We don't think it's lots of fun if you were to fall from a train and lose one of your legs or your life. This has already happened to many people and we know you're very aware of this. Search for a way in which you can live your life away from danger. With this piece, we get the impression that you like danger and that is very bad.

Lo Que Me Hace Fuerte

Lo que me hace fuerte es mi familia, mi raza y mis homies aqui en la juvenile. Cuando estaba en las calles, cometi muchos errores, pero ya estoy aqui.

Pienso mucho en mi familia porque cuando yo estaba creciendo siempre era un niño pobre y siempre voy a ser pobre. Voy a hacer lo mejor de la vida para salir adelante. Ya no hay tiempo.

From The Beat: Creemos que puedes llegar a ser alguien en la vida siempre y cuando sigas por un buen camino. ¿Crees que puedas?

What Makes Me Strong

What makes me strong is my family, my Latin people, and my homies, here in Juvenile. When I was out on the streets, I committed a lot of errors, but I am already here.

I think a lot about my family because when I was growing up, I was always a poor boy and I am always going to be poor. I am going to make the best of life so I can move up in life. There's no more time.

-Edgar, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: We believe that you can always grow-up to be someone in life when you follow a good path. Do you believe you can do so?

Pensar En Mi Vida Y En Aquellos Que Quiero

Hey que onda? Soy el Soldado. Todas las noches me pongo a pensar en cuando vaya a salir, en cuando voy a estar con mi familia de nuevo, con mi novia o con mis homies. Aqui encerrado lo único que puedo hacer es recordar los momentos que pasé allá afuera. No me aguito porque si ya pase once meses en este programa lo puedo terminar. Sólo me faltan ocho meses para salir y todo por tonteras que he cometido. Ahora sí ya quiero el programa donde estoy para poder hacer lo que quiero hacer.

Lo que me duele mucho es la muerte de mi abuela, la de mi hermano y la de mis homies. Que descancen en paz todos los muertos. Algún día nos va a llegar el turno a nosotros también. Pues los guachos a todos los homies. Los guacho al rato. Un saludo a los homies y a todos los catrachos.

From The Beat: Estamos contigo! Es la única forma la cual tu puedes terminar con todo este drama. ¿Qué haras despues que termines el programa? ¿Iras a la escuela? ¿Haras lo posible para mantenerte en el camino correcto el cual no te llebe al mismo lugar donde estas ahorita? Sentimos mucho tu pérdida, y esperamos que esten gozando de un buen descanzo donde sea que se encuentren. Suerte amigo en tu caminada.

Thinking About My Life And About Those Whom I Love

Hey, what's up? I'm the "Soldier." Every night, I start to think on when I am going to be getting out, on when I am going to be with my family again, with my girlfriend, or with my homies. While I am locked up in here, the only thing I can do is remember the moments that I spent on the outs. I don't get down because if I have already spent eleven months in this program, I can finish it. I only have eight months to complete in order to leave and all because of stupid acts that I have committed. Now, I do like the program in which I am in here so I can be able to do what I want to do.

What hurts me a lot is the death of my grandmother, the death of my brother, and the death of my homies. May all those who have passed away rest in peace. Someday it is going to be our turn, too. Well, to all the homies, I'll see y'all later. I'll see y'all in a little bit. Greetings to the homies and to all the Hondurean people.

-Jonathan B5

From The Beat: We're with you! It is the only way in which you'll be able to put an end to all this drama. What are you going to do after you finish the program? Will you go to school? Will you do whatever is possible to keep yourself on the right path, the one which will not lead you to the same place you find yourself in right now? We deeply regret to hear about your losses and we hope that they're happily resting wherever they may be. Good luck, friend, on your journey.

Lo Que Me Mantiene Dispierto

Lo que me mantiene dispierto son los problemas que pasan en mi familia y los problemas que tengo que no me dejan dormir. También tengo mucho trauma de las cosas que me han pasado, como no poder ver a mi mama ni a mi familia. También pensar en esos momentos de la libertad.

Nunca le he pedido la cabeza y ni sé que es estar loco porque siempre procuro vivir la vida como es de real. Estar en la juvenile no significa que me voy a volver loco. Simplemente, esto yo me lo busque y tengo que vivir día con día. No tengo que pensar que es la juvenile. Simplemente esto es algo nuevo en mi vida y jovenes nuevo que he conocido. Que me deprima un poco es algo normal. Siempre me acuerdo de lo más bonito que he vivido y eso me da vida.

From The Beat: ¿Y como es vivir la vida real para tí? ¿Es normal estar aqui para tí? ¿O consideras que esto es solo una experiencia que tubistes que pasar para poder arreglar tus pensamientos sobre las cosas que quieres hacer o la forma como quieres vivir la vida?

What Keeps Me Up At Night

What keeps me up at night are the problems that come up in my family and the problems that I have, and they don't let me sleep. I also have a lot of trauma from the things that have happened to me like how I am not able to see my mother or my family. I also think about those moments of freedom.

I have never asked my head nor do I know what going crazy is because I always try to live life for what it is and that's real. Being in Juvenile does not mean that I am going to go crazy. Simply, I sought all this upon myself and I have to live day by day. I don't have to think that this place is Juvenile. This is simply something new in my life and new teenagers that I have met. For this to cause me to get a little depressed is something normal. I always recall the most beautiful moments that I have lived and that gives me life.

-Francisco B4

From The Beat: And how is it to live life for real for you? Is being in this place normal for you? Or do you consider this as merely an experience that you had to go through in order for you to fix your thoughts regarding the things that you want to do or the way you want to live life?

Por Los Vicios Y Malas Influencias

Mi mamá y mi novia me han dicho que han notado una gran diferencia en mi persona. Cuando empece andar en los vicios como fumar mota y otras cosas, mi mente empezo a pensar diferente.

Aveces no puedo dormir en el cuarto por estar pensando en los homies y en mi familia. Aveces me parece que ya nunca voy a volver a ver a un homie o algún familiar. Por eso, he estado pensando todo el tiempo que estoy en el cuarto encerrado. Orale homies, ya me aburri de escribirles. Les mando un saludo de parte del Catracho.

From The Beat: Entonces eso quiere decir que tu cambio se debe a los malos vicios y a las malas influencias. Deberías de buscar la manera como alejarte antes que esas cosas te alejen de tus seres queridos. Usa este tiempo para mejorar tu forma de pensar y de actuar. No es justo hacer sufrir a los que más te quieren por culpa a otros que no se lo merecen.

Because Of Bad Habits And Bad Influences

My mother and my girlfriend have told me that they have noticed a huge difference in me. When I started to involve myself in bad habits like smoking weed and other things, my mind started to think differently.

Sometimes, I cannot sleep in my room because I am thinking about the homies and about my family. Sometimes it appears to me that I will never get the chance to see a homie or a family member. That's why I have been spent all my time thinking whenever I am locked up in my room.

All right then, homies, I'm bored writing to y'all. I send y'all greeting on behalf of the "Catracho."

-Smiley B2

From The Beat: So, that means that your change is a result of your bad habits and bad influences. You should find the way to distance yourself from these things before these things cause you to be separated from your loved ones. Use this time to improve your way of thinking and acting. It is not just for you to make the people who love you the most suffer because of other people because they you're loved ones don't deserve that.

Lo Que Me Mantiene Dispierto

Lo que me mantiene dispierto en las noches es pensar, pensar en estar una noche más en este lugar. También pensar en que no puedo hacer lo que quiero como jugar play station o salir divertirme y también pensar que no estaré una noche más con mi madre y hermanos hablando de mis hermanas. Un saludo a mi hermano que esta en otra unidad. También pensar que no puedo estar con mi novia.

Si algunas veces he perdido mi mente, pero es porque he andado alcoholizado. Se te pierde la mente cuando tomas demaciado alcohol. No se los recomiendo.

Aveces me imagino cuando estoy en mi cuarto encerrado que estoy afuera de este lugar con las personas que quiero.

Gracias a Dios por todo lo bueno de esta noche.

From The Beat: Pues todas estas cosas las pudieras haber estado haciendo sino hubieras cometido estos tipos errores. ¿Crees que hayas aprendido tu lección esta vez? Tú sabes las cosas que tienes que hacer para salirte de este rollo. Agradecemos tu consejo y esperamos que muchos lo tomen en serio antes que se arrepientas de haber hecho algo que se pudo haber prevenido. ¿Dinos sobres tus planes? ¿Has pensado en cambiar tu vida una vez que salgas de aqui? ¿Cómo?

What Keeps Me Awake Night

What keeps me awake at night is thinking — thinking about having to spend one more night in this place. Also, thinking about how I cannot do what I want to like play PlayStation or go out, enjoy myself, and also thinking about how I'm going to spend one more night away from my mother and brothers, talking about my sisters. A shout-out goes to my brother who is in another unit. Also, thinking about how I cannot be with my girlfriend.

Yes, I have lost my mind a couple of times, but that is because I was under the influence of alcohol. You lose your mind when you drink way too much alcohol. I don't recommend doing this to anyone.

Sometimes, when I am locked up in my room, I imagine that I am out of this place and with the people that I love.

Thanks to God for all the good from this night.

-Dimas B2

From The Beat: Well, you could have been doing all these things if you had not committed these kinds of mistakes. Do you believe that this time, you have learned your lesson? You know the things that you have to do in order to get yourself out of this web. We appreciate your words of advice and we hope that lots of people take them seriously before they feel remorseful for having done something that could have been prevented had they followed your words of advice. Tell us about your plans? Have you thought about changing your life once you get out of this place? How?

Jugo Con Mi Corazón

Que onda? Soy "El Duende" y estoy aqui de nuevo con los homies de Santa Cruz aunque aveces alegamos. Cambiando de tema, me van a mandar a otro group home en Fresno. Esta vez si quiero cumplirlo para estar con mi familia en Navidad.

Yo antes tenía una novia bien firme y la amaba con todo mi corazón, pero jugo con mis sentientos y quiero olvidarla. Es todo lo que quiero decirles por ahorita. Trucha a los que me conocen. Saben, siempre pueden contar conmigo.

From The Beat: Pues solo el tiempo y las ganas de olvidarla te van a poder ayudar a olvidarla. Algún día llegara esa muchacha que tanto sueñas y tendras todo el amor que necesitas. ¿Pero, la pregunta es, estaras ahí por ella?

She Played With My Heart

What's up? I'm "El Duende" and I am here again with the homies from Santa Cruz, even though sometimes we're separated. Changing topic, they're going to send me to another Group Home in Fresno. This time, I do want to complete my program so I can be with my family for Christmas.

Before, I had a very cool girlfriend and I loved her with all my heart, but she played with my emotions and I want to forget about her. That's all I want to share with y'all for right now. To those who know me, keep your guards up. Y'all know that y'all can always count on me.

-Duende, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Well, only time and the urge to forget her are going to help you forget about her. One day, that girl that you dream about so much will come to you and you'll have all the love that you need. But, the question is, will you be there for her?

I have lost my mind a couple of times, but that is because I was under the influence of alcohol. You lose your mind when you drink way too much alcohol. I don't recommend doing this to anyone.

Lo Que Nos Vuelve Loco

Aveces los problemas de los demás vuelve loco a uno. Los problemas de las calles y las de la juvenile los estan volviendo loco. Muy pocos tenemos buenas historias. Quisiera estar afuera pero al mismo tiempo quisiera seguir estudiando.

Aveces me pongo a pensar en las cosas que hice y me arrepiento.

From The Beat: ¿Entonces estar en esta situación te está volviendo loco? ¿En otras palabras tus propias decisiones te estan volviendo loco? ¿Has pensado en como safarte de este cuarto de locura?

What Drives Us Crazy

Sometimes, other people's problems can make one crazy. The problems of the streets and the ones from Juvenile are making people crazy. There's not that many of us who have good histories. I would like to be outside, but at the same time, I would like to continue studying.

Sometimes I start to think about the things that I did and I regret them.

-Melsar B1

From The Beat: So, being in this situation is making you go crazy? In other words, your own decisions are making you go crazy? Have you thought on how you can free yourself from this room of madness?

Cuando Pienso En Mi Gente

Lo que aveces me mantiene dispierto es porque pienso en todo lo que me ha pasado en estos últimos meses. Pienso en estos últimos meses y pienso en cuando sera el día que voy a salir a ver a mi familia, en mi esposa, en mis hijos, en mis amigos, en todo lo que pudiera estar haciendo sino estubiera aqui.

Aveces me imagino en que llego donde mi familia y que todo esto ha terminado, pero cuando vuelvo a la realidad veo que estoy en el mismo lugar. Es ahí donde me siento deprimido y triste. Sólo le pido a Dios que me de fuerzas y que me ayude todos los días para salir de aqui.

From The Beat: Son muchos pensamientos los que cruzan tu mente. Es natural que te sientas de esta manera. Todo nosotros extrañaríamos a nuestra familia o nuestros seres queridos si estubieramos encerrado. Lo que tienes que hacer ahora es ver en como hacer las cosas correctas. Ten calma, tu tiempo llegará y tendras la oportunidad de ver a tu gente. Por el momento deberías de planear en no volver a caer a este lugar. Dios te dará la fuerzas que necesitas, pero tienes que aceptarla con el corazón. Suerte!

When I Think About My People

What keeps me awake at times at night is because I think about all the things that have happened to me these past couple of months. I think about these past couple of months and I think on when will that day come in which I get released so I can see my family, my wife, my kids, my friends, and I also think about all the things I could be doing if I were not in here.

Sometimes I imagine that moment in which I am reunited with my family and the moment when all this has come to an end, but when I come back to reality, I see that I am in the same place. That's when I feel depressed and sad. I just ask God to give me strength and to help me everyday so I can get out of here.

-Darwin B4

From The Beat: The thoughts that pass through your mind are many. It's natural for you to feel this way. All of us would be missing our family or our loved ones if we were locked up. What you have to do now is focus on doing the right things. Be calm; your time will come when you will have the opportunity to see your people again. In the mean time, you should be coming up with a plan that will help you not end up in this place again. God will give you the strength you need, but you have to accept it with your heart. Good luck!

Through Me

I see a girl running through nothing but grass and flowers, the very pretty green grass and flowers, and bright colors. She wears a bright flowered dress, and with her hands out and a big smile on her face and two tears running down from her eyes, she runs because she is set free. But she still has her ups and downs... she carries herself very confidently, but she still needs to learn how to love herself, and be honest with herself and others. She understands what she went through and why she went through it at a very young age, and she knows she has the Lord God by her side, but she... she is still left wondering. Very little people went through what she went through, and she has to forgive herself for what she did, but she still cannot forget!! She has very little (sic) that people don't believe in her that she cannot succeed, but she thinks people don't want to see her succeed in life. That brings her down, but she knows she could succeed because she's seen it happen!! And she will be strong and strong minded and focus on her future. And though she cant go back and change her past, she can focus on her future, and can be anything she wants to be. HER LIFE IS NOT YET TO BE OVER, and she will succeed.

-Lil' Miss Y

My World, My Expression

One single woman with so much emotion, expression and ideas.
She has confidence in her words
Actions in which she makes herself feel good
In heart and body.
She expresses this music with body language
(Dancing.)
Not at all afraid to show and give imagination.
Because to her it is real.
Setting scenes to place out what she feels.

The woods, the big tall green trees, leveled at all the same height, almost perfectly lined as if someone put them there with their bare hands... grass at low flow, nothing else around but what she imagined, but with sight... so much detail... natural trees and her eyes flow at what it seems to be like the end of the woods but flowing off foot... into the dear blue sky not one single thing as far as you want to see it... near are clouds of blue and mixtures of pink like a float and it feels so free not sitting on anything at all.

Roaming...

...into what seem like circles and going nowhere it gets dark as if the sun were setting in a beautiful ocean of water with orange red and yellow visible sun ahead of her on a soothing so peaceful water with no waves the ocean has so much motion with so little movement... two seconds away from what just seemed a whole millennium from the sun setting... into a dark maze walls black and very high one hallway and she turns as though the world turns around each and every corner another color appears black blue red yellow orange... as she walks through with so much energy in her mind so little noise on the outside of her ears... clock seems never to click one time until she gets to where she was looking for... her true peaceful world... tall trees and a natural look... blue clear sky with beautiful hand made clouds... little lakes while up ahead but down on reflection... the sun on the water... with immaculate color... flowers all around like the colors of the rainbow.

Nothing at a stand still.
Everything here goes as far as you can see.
Grass soft enough to be slept on
This world, her world,
Of beauty, color, life, expression.

-KK

Paradise

This story is about a young couple named PARADISE and they are madly in love. They are a very charming young couple with a conceited attitude. They think they're better than everyone else. MR. PARADISE has beautiful curly hair with green eyes, and light brown freckles that cover his vanilla crème face. And as for MRS. PARADISE, she has good hair as well with brown eyes and has a nice mocha tone to her skin color as well as a beauty mark that stands out on her neck. They are located on an island called PARADISE; which includes a waterfall with clear beautiful water located near an ocean with clean green sand. It's surrounded by palm trees which are covered with hundred dollar bills. Everyone that's present on the Island has their lover with them and they are all having a good time. There's no conflict due to the fact that it's a lovers land so everyone is on Cloud 9.

The End

- Paradise

HOPES OF A WAR TO END

On a battlefield on a dawn day a war takes place. A village not far from the battlefield had been destroyed the people from outside the village. The village people were scared, but one person, a young woman, just stood there and watched as everything happened right in front of her. She sees her village being destroyed and her people being hurt. So many things begin to happen at once. The young woman just stood there with a look of grief on her face wishing that this terrible war would stop. The village people began running, crying and hurt. As the young woman stands there she hopes that this would all end soon. These are HOPES OF A WAR TO END.

-Smiley

From The Beat: We are so honored to welcome back the SF/YGC B3 Butterflies! A big thank you goes to SF/YGCs Woodside School English teacher Megan Mercurio who is an awesome teacher who so believes in the voices of the young people she teaches. What follows is the Butterflies latest submissions. We so look forward to continue working with Megan and her class of fabulous writers in the coming weeks! We hope you all enjoy their latest installment of work as much as we do. We'll proudly let the Butterflies take it from here...

From The B3 Butterflies: Each and every day we meet as an English class for nearly two hours, and try to make sense of our lives and the world around us. We do this by getting to know the characters on the pages of the literature we read, and by examining our own lives so that we can leave the institution transformed and empowered young women. Our writing arises from our souls, and from the myriad experiences we have endured in our short time on earth. Judge us not, simply take in our words with an open heart and learn from the emotions and stories of our lives. The following stories are the products of our individual creative writing responses to a single song "Flowers Become Screens" by Delerium. The diversity of our minds' imaginings will bring you a little closer into our disparate, and yet all too similar worlds. Special Thanks: Lauryn Livengood

Creative Writing Through Music

There are three women. The oldest is 42 and she has green eyes and long blonde hair. She is trapped in a dark maze. She is running trying to find her way out of the dark maze and she can't find her way out until the music ends.

Now she's out. She is listening to music... she has probably been through a lot of stuff and needs to listen to some low and misunderstood music to distract her from focusing on the dark maze.

Did I mention her name is April?

The second woman, by the name of Sharika, is 39. She has a twin sister by the name of Rika. Rika became successful, unlike Sharika. Sharika is bright skinned, has hazel eyes and is trying to escape the mental hospital.

While she's running, her mind seems to travel.

Nonsense started running her crazy too, so she just sat in a little corner and started to cry, because she was terrified. The guard found her, and brought her to a locked down room, and she was tied to the bed and the only three people who came to visit her were April, Shovona, and Rika.

The third woman's name is Shovona. She is 32 and she is at an auditorium meditating... trying to get her mind off of her two best friends who are struggling with their everyday lives. A short while after she meditated, she started to clown dance, which is how people dance to some kind of strange music without saying anything.

She just danced to the beat of the music.

The End.

-Rosevette

she started to clown dance, which is how people dance to some kind of strange music without saying anything. She just danced to the beat of the music.

The Girl And Her Song!!!

There is a girl that loves to go out with her friends, but she never talks that much. She wears all black and a ponytail. She loves punk rock songs, and she loves to look out her window. One day she met the boy of her dreams.

They had been going together for weeks, when one day she did not say a thing to her boyfriend, and he started beating her up. The girl's friends told her to stop seeing this boy so she did not have to cry any more, but she did not care what they thought and she kept telling him so he beat on her every day. The girl was sad that he was doing things to her to make her mad.

Now she has a song that is telling everything about what had went on in her life and how he beat her up and how she did not do what her friends told her to do...

-Flav Baby Mamma

WILLIAM GRAJEDA ***A BWO section just doesn't seem complete without the likes of people like Ray Sanchez, Israel Perez, Michail Markhasev, and this next writer. William Grajeda is a teacher of teachers. He comes from a place of understanding and wisdom through his many experiences as he's empathetic enough to attempt to keep us from going down the same path. His pieces always offer tough love and hope that we can do something better. He makes us believe we will do something better. He's an incredible writer who we really appreciate hearing from. In his latest envelope addressed to us he sends us two pieces. The first a 'Dear Mr. President' contest piece, which we will hold until we start running the rest of the entries, and the following, "Hey! Can I Please Have A Moment Of Your Time, To Share Some Truths With You?" In this piece he offers a challenge to the youngsters that many of our BWO writers have been offering lately, and that's to wake up and change your ways before you end up in the empty cell next to him. And he assures you that even if not in that one, there will always be a spot for you in jail for that's one industry that's secure. We have learned to love William and his writing because we've seen how powerful it is to those who choose to read his creations. He's writing from Santa Rita (Alameda County Jail) waiting to go back to prison where he promises to keep writing to us. We look forward to hearing from you Beat Within superstar.***

Hey! Can I Please Have A Moment Of Your Time, To Share Some Truths With You?

So you think living the ghetto life is cool? Ya' think being born in the projects is something to be proud of!? Are you really that blind or is your mind just that full of movie scripts and Hollywood fantasy. There is nothing Hollywood about your moms struggling with life, getting high, shootin' dope, smoking coke, walkin' back and forth from the streets to the county jail and around the prison block.

Where's my dad?! Who's your dad?! My dad is in prison for life, my dad is smoking dope somewhere, my dad is a dead beat, I don't know who my dad is, my dad left before I was born, my dad got shot when I was young, my dad is a chump... "Ditto that two times" where's my mom? Where's your mom? Who's your mom? Ditto that two times in one... some of us don't have neither one; grandpa and grandma always tried their best, but that ghetto life already turned the heart indifferently cold to any promising trust or kindness.

Standing in welfare lines, hand-me-down clothes for the new school year, free hot lunches, a leather belt whenever you step out of line; everyone knows the kid from the street, everyone knows the kid from the ghetto block or broken home, no matter where you go, the ghetto kid everyone knows.

You don't have to smile and hurry away, you don't have to pretend for a while that we are all the same, you don't have to make brief excuses about how everything is going to be okay and then turn around and pretend "that" encounter never happened, while you make a mental note to yourself to avoid the next "ghetto kid encounter," next time around. You don't have to pat my hand and look sad at me, then turn around and tell your friend about your filthy and miserable visit you made to the dead end streets today, while you order your roasted leg of lamb, crème brulée and sip your delicate wines...

I am gonna ball, I am gonna shine, I'm gonna grind, I'ma lay down a platinum track.... I am gonna ride, I'ma get my scraper on, I'ma bust the choppa, I'ma get mine.... Pass the blunt homie, sip the Hen, I'ma be the boss on the block, I'ma be quick to get blurped, I'ma be stupid purved in the club goin' dumb, I'ma pop the collar more'n one time... I don't need to look both ways before I cross the street, I live on the freeway — fast food quick — steps is how I eat; Motel Six, holiday suite is how I sleep... You know what time it is....

I think I was about nine or ten years old, somewhere in between the leather belt, extension cord whippin's, that I seem to have lost count of, and witnessing the countless time the cops took my mom or dad away from me, that I began to stop coming; or that I began to feel the innocence of life slipping away. It was then I would make my first of, what would become many future visits, to juvenile hall and by the end of the fifth grade I would pretty much be dropped out of school and become a regular guest inside juvenile halls and replacement homes. I didn't understand why the cops kept taking my precious mom away from me, or why my dad would be abusive to us whenever he didn't like something my mom or I have done. I didn't understand why my mom loved this dude, or why we had to visit him when he was in prison. I didn't understand why she or he had to use drugs; but mostly, I didn't understand why life had stopped being so fun, why there seemed to be so much pain and tears all of a sudden, why my mom seemed to cry so much, why we seemed to have lost touch with each other inside and why everyone outside the projects, the ghetto streets seemed to look at and treat us differently, and why there was so much drama upon drama within our own ghetto families... but then again, all this is happening in real time... I am only eight, nine, ten, thirteen years old, what the hell do I know, right? I am just another ghetto kid, another elementary school dropout, another welfare baby tryna eat... I don't know nothing from nothing right! So pass me the blunt homie, sip the hen — lets hit Jack In The Crack or that taco truck up the block...

Wassup homie? Did you see that cat get laid down last night? — blood all over the sidewalk in front of the spot, yellow crime scene tape left in the gutter... "It's hot" — who's the next cat in line to get chopped, who's the next block boss in line to get jacked? There's always someone waiting their turn to be known on the spot. "Do you hear that new born baby crying?" Another ghetto kid has been born; we need food for the kids, we need pampers for the baby, who's going to buy the school clothes? Welfare money isn't enough... We need a job, we need gas money! Ain't nobody hiring ex-felons and minimum wage won't take care of two, three kids, let alone four or five and pay the house bills and gas money for the car!

What are we gonna do? We gotta do something! Call your mom for help! Already did! Try your cousin or uncle! Already did! Try your sister or aunty! Already did! Try homeboy or home girl! They are doing just as bad! Damn, what are we going to do? Damn, the shhh is all bad... pampers, food, clothes, shoes, rent, water, and gas for the car we all need! Damn this ain't right! I'ma man — we need to eat... cop a bird, cop a double up, find the lick, get the hustle, make it happen, everything will be okay... no time to sleep, no time to sit, it's time to knock, hustle, serve and check the clip... lets get it.

I do remember a time when a few of us ghetto kids used to get together and play cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers; or mission impossible, and street football was always a favorite. We used to catch a few soda pops and candy bars somewhere in between the day or sneak a quick snack from the local grocery store if we didn't have any money. I also remember that we used to share dreams with each other along the way; about how I was going to join the army or be a train conductor when I got big and my friends wanted to be a fireman, a race car driver, a baseball player, a mechanic and there was always the occasional aspiring bank robber or hitman, but they usually ended up being the few who actually made it out of the ghetto early on or they died too young.

I remember how after our little snack breaks, we would get back to our fun and games and continue to assume our collective roles of fireman, soldiers, football player or Batman and Robin and play our games well into the night while our parents or guardians got their party on or were too busy to be worrying about us that day. Of course this wasn't an everyday event, but it was one of the ghetto moments or free days that us ghetto kids would come to share together forever and of which also ties us together in heart and spirit in more than one way. Some of us got to share in these precious moments more than others; nevertheless, it is these last moments that reflect the ending of our ghetto innocence as we returned back into the darkness of our ghetto lives and the various degree of our broken homes at the end of the day... per chance to become one thing or another, but certainly not what we once dreamed of in those moments of ghetto innocence.

Tah, Tah, Ta, bang, bang, bang "Everyone down on the yard! Everyone down on the yard now!" Bullets flying "boom, boom, boom - tears gas smoke clouds everywhere, "bullets flying;" blood dripping from shank wounds, razor blade slashes, bullet holes, and prison guard baton panic... eyes are burning, your palms are stained crimson blue, face smothered in concrete dirt... what's happening homies? Q-vole vato, how's everything going? Long time no see "carnal!" How long you in for this time? Damn homes, they washed a vato up this time! Shhh. I've been down nine on this soleta (term) with six to go! It's all bad homie, I'm just trying to survive vato, you know entiendez... yeah, looks like the same old mess when I seen you last time in the jungle back when homie! Everything has just gotten worse, they took the good packages away, no more Playboys, no more smoking, more overcrowding and everyone dying from poor health care! Don't get sick in here homie or your assed-out, ain't no doctors in this joint qualified to help you! Orale homeboy, remember so and so? Yeah! Passed away in High Desert, last year got caught slippin' in New Folsom, picked up a cold one in Salinas, everyone else is scattered around or still being held captive in the SHU... ain't nothing new homie, you know what time it is... yeah, same old crooked games in the devil's playground...

What happened to the memories of chasing those ice cream trucks, waiting for Santa Claus and his reindeers or playing our

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WILLIAM GRAJEDA (CONT.)

continued from previous page

favorite make-believe-games in the park? Whoever said it was time to stop being a kid at heart? When did the moment come when we stopped laughing in life? When did we stop giving out genuine hugs and kisses, candy smiles and sticky grins? Trading them for Old English bottles, zig-zag papers and then started handing out hard looks, mean punches, knife wounds and bullet holes? When did that happen?

There was a time in our lives when we weren't so cruel to each other, there was a time when we didn't wish or bring pain and suffering to our neighbors. Whether it be returning pain for pain, hate for hate or violence for violence, surely we stopped caring for ourselves when we began to bring violence against our neighbors, against our fellow human beings over material possessions or words from an angry tongue; even if justice or common sense seemed to be on your side, returning violence with violence or hate for hate only compounded the suffering of all the people involved with greater pain and violence to come afterwards. Perhaps if we could understand this and see that our future generations of mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters will be born into a ghetto life of pain, hate, and violence; which we perpetuate both ignorantly and purposefully — perhaps if we truly understood as we once did in our innocence, that we posses the power to stop perpetuating the deterioration of the ghetto life by forgiving yourself and your neighbors offense and by making a decision that you will stop the violence by being peaceful, that you will defeat hatred by being kind, that you will conquer pain by being forgiving; and with such strength of godly love you will truly help affect real change in the heart of the ghetto class.

We cannot relocate or solve the cruel pains or violence that has been bred within the generations of suffering ghetto juvenile youth, but we can play our part in affecting changes by not continuing to perpetuate the ghetto violence that has caused, is causing so much suffering to ourselves and our loved ones. We can even go further by sharing kindness and love to our fellow ghetto class and forgive the past that we hold hostage within our minds, of which, has fueled our violence, anger, pain and afflictions for this long and had prevented us from moving forward in life; thus enslaving ourselves in our own self-loathing, pain inflicted prison.

But what the hell do I know, right! After all, I am the ghetto child bred into another generation of project life, that has turned into a harden convict after years of juvenile, C.Y.A. and prison time. I'm not only the by-product of the impoverished ghetto class of broken homes and prison systems, but over time I have become the willing and un-willing perpetrator of this very ghetto, street lifestyle that I both condemn and suffer in my own heart for.

Homeboy just got out today after doing 15 years — paroled the last five of those out the SHU: pale as a ghost, looking like a vampire coming up from the underworld, but feeling like he just popped out a mother's womb all grown up into a strange fast moving world. Got five job interviews lined up this week; got seven job interviews lined up for next week, got twenty more for the week after that... though his job experience is somewhat limited, he has common sense, easy learning ability and plenty of energetic spirit to succeed — after all, Pelican Bay SHU doesn't exactly have any job training classes one can attend to before being released back to society. Anyhow, let the job interviews begin: let's start with;

Job interview #6) Hello Mr. Ex-felon; we have reviewed your resume, you have presented yourself very well, your manners are spotless... I'm sorry to inform you that our company does not deem it ethical to hire ex-felons in its employ... I'm sorry. Good luck

Job interview: #17) Hello Mr. Ex-felon; we have reviewed your resume, your have made a very good presentation. However, I'm sorry but we are not in the practice of hiring ex-felons, I'm sure you understand, please have a nice day...

Job interview: #24) Hello Mr. Ex-felon; we have reviewed your resume, it is very well organized and you have made a super presentation, however, after speaking with your parole officer we are concerned about your past gang violence and the safety of our employs are our first priority; I'm sorry, we regret to say, I'm sure you can understand Mr. Ex-felon... good Luck.

Job Interview #31) forget that restaurant! Forget that car wash! Forget that warehouse job! Forget that janitor opening! Forget that pizzeria! Forget that delivery job! Forget that grocery store, forget fff... etcetera, etcetera, etc...

Time to call an old homeboy — pick up the phone... hey! What's happenin' homes? Long time — I need to come up with the connect... you know what time it is! Are you sure homes? I thought you was doing good! Yeah it's ruff homes... I am back on line, got one foot in the street, one foot in the gutter, I gotta get some bread, milk, and honey... forget George W. Bush's hypocrisy and war-mongering lies and all that republicanism blue-blood BS. Everyone came to America impoverished, so why do you keep your own Americans in poverty? Huh! Then try to blame Americas crime rates on your impoverished, homeless, or American ghetto class people; pretending that you got your head buried too deep in Afghan and Iraqi sands.

Sitting inside a cage of silent darkness, deaf to the sounds of fragmented memories lost to a time of innocence — you are fighting as a valiant warrior on a battlefield; on a battlefield that has been laid in between two suffocating enemies breathing both fire and hell as the dragon rages and the beast devours. The tension thickens inside your dark silence while the fear rages in your resistance against both dragon and beast — are you close to victory or close to defeat? Or is this a never-ending battle of recycled deceits? Who will prevail in time? Will you conquer your dragons and defeat the cage of the beast? Or have you surrendered your heart as a trophy between the two? No longer caring for your soul as you become lost inside a world of darkness.

Sitting in a cage waiting for the prison guard to set you up with an enemy, sitting in a cage wondering if you will ever make your parole date, sitting in a cage waiting to pass your next test, sitting in a cage wondering if baby girl will wait that long, sitting in a cage losing hope, sitting in a cage knowing all your last chances of freedom are gone, sitting in a cage worrying about the family you left behind, sitting in a cage wondering what evil comes next, sitting in a cage it's never too late to find god, sitting in a cage it's never too late to welcome God into your life... I am sitting in a cage what the heck do I know, right!

What's happenin' lil' homie, young g', okay, yeah, you say you're a 'hood cat, you're proud of the 'hood business — so we gonna keep it real then! Because we know that deep in our 'hood hearts we are not proud of what's inside the 'hood life. Without a doubt the street life has made us tough, we have become hard of heart and have that 'hood attitude of lost hopes. But we know that those who are proud of street living are just pretending to really hide the reality that many 'hood families have nowhere else to go or many have just lost hope in making it out of that 'hood cycle. It is the signs of lost hopes inside the 'hood and it is those 'hood families of broken homes that are the heart and life blood of the 'hood. Generations who have been bred by poverty and generations of hoodies long before him or her.

Deep in our hearts of 'hood hearts we know ain't nothing proud about being from the 'hood, unless you made it out of the hood alive and are moving forward from the bottom to the top of our goals, or from the deadened streets to becoming a changing influence in the ghetto community.

We keeping it real my lil' homies, we gonna keep the hood truth real; everyone in the hood is tryna ball, hustle, grind and serve for a real reason! Besides tryna put food on the table and buy pampers for the baby — there is that deep seeded hope we all have buried in our hearts. That one day we can stack up enough racks to raise up outta this ghetto trap. No matter how many of our 'hood people we see get laid to rest in the grave yards, or watch get sent up state for 10, 15, 25 to life term bids, we still have that distant hope of being the ones who makes it out one day or the one who survives to see and help our ghetto family or next generation of ghetto babies have a life filled with stronger hope, stronger love, and stronger guidance of seeing the many roads of bright futures and possible destinies that lay in there infinite horizons.

Yeah well, what the heck do I know anyways, right! Look at me after all — a ghetto baby born in a broken home that moved in between welfare and street living as I grew into being the ghetto kid grown into the barrio life of the projects, gradually becoming that young juvenile homie, getting my bang and slang on while tryna do the damn thing, only to become what such a life is destined to become: a ward of the state in CYA (California Youth Authority) for six years before moving on to the state pen straight from the "Y"... only to get lost for the next ten years in the jungle and buried in the SHU (Security Housing Unit).

But what the heck do I know, right? Well let me tell you lil' homie, if you choose my way, then there is always an empty cage right next to mine, I'll keep a cup of coffee waiting for you, don't worry I have all day, so there is no need to rush... at least think about it for a little while homie, you might surprise yourself. I sure still have hope in you.

IMANI MASON ***Writing from Corcoran State Prison in Corcoran, CA, we give you a hot new writer on the scene. He's read The Beat and has got affected by it like most of us do, with utter amazement and respect for the intelligent writing we publish. It's a shame that most of the kids writing aren't even aware of how many people they reach. Most of them would probably take the workshops more serious if they did know. But anyhow, this next writer hits us with a letter and two very talented poems. His letter is where he expresses his appreciation for what The Beat's doing. His first poem is about him and his 'introduction' to us. And he closes with a very powerful poem dedicated to a very powerful woman — his mother. Be on the look out for Imani Mason, because it seems like he'll quickly become a Beat favorite.***

A Gift From The Heart To A Black Mother Queen

Mother, I shall let it be known that you are loved
Precious and cherished by many and our creator...
Above
Your eyes tell a story, who has seen and endured much
Yet you possess a great strength; to never give up
Each day is a struggle — but it can't last
You said it yourself; "this too will pass"
Up ahead mother! The road gets smooth
Persevere queen the future looks promising for you
Since you are a queen; does that make me a king?
Reign proud mother, you birthed ten beautiful offspring
So hold your head high, better yet look to the heavens
You need not answer my question, your first born;
A king — will always hold you with reverence
On you special day, ordinary as it seems...
Here, a gift from the heart to my;
Black mother queen.

My Introduction

My introduction may start off a little ruff,
The ghetto of class poverty deadened any heartfelt emotions...
Just too recently I didn't give a ••••
The south central streets foretold my destiny
My body chalk-lined or my life penitentiary invested,
In between...
Gang-bang connected.
As I rewind back a little-bit,
I can tell you how drugs destroyed my family happiness.
The day the streets snatched my grandmother away...
Became the day that seemingly sealed my fate,
Moms couldn't handle it — she sought escape...
Still don't know pops 'till this very day.
That little white devil offered moms escape...
What it did to her left me in dismay,
Too painful for me to elaborate!
So much anger, so much hate...
Then childcare services took me and my siblings away,
Taken to a foreign atmosphere where people pretend to care.
My first jacket...
Captivity my shoulders were to bear,
Group homes, foster homes; I been damn near to them all
Hit juvie, seen camp, now these penitentiary walls,
The judge said this is my final destination
I sensed triumph in his voice
I recognized it as complacent.
Another African committed to statistics.
Modern day plantation ran by sadistics!
My burden, our burden has yet to ease,
Our plight is heavy rather stiff indeed.
Nevertheless we must remain vigilant than ever,
For only "we" can make us free!
This is the introduction of many of us in "captivity"
Shall we not mold our own conclusion?
The war isn't over...
But the battle we are losing

So much anger, so much hate...
Then childcare services took me and my siblings away,
Taken to a foreign atmosphere where people pretend to care.
My first jacket...
Captivity my shoulders were to bear

Dear Beat Within

First off, it is my hopes that this letter reaches your staff and organization in the best of health in all aspects. I extend an abundance of respect and gratitude to you all for your unwavering of concern and attention to those of us behind these institution walls. Truly you are doing exactly what the penal system has failed to do; that is reach out to us and allow us to express ourselves unveiled, as well as allow us to take a glimpse at each other's sorrows, happiness, and aspirations. Something that is rare as we know it but dare not expose such vulnerability. So it sits well with me to know that I can obtain and contribute a two–fold accomplishment; one is to express myself, and two would be to connect with someone else's problems and maybe they can find some comfort in the expressions as I have; which cause me to be inspired to pour-forth a thought or two via The Beat Within. Once again, thank you!

In addition, I wish to become a subscriber. Accompanied with this letter and request, is two (2) works that I've written, one is dedicated to my moms and the other is a spontaneous spill of emotions uncut. If they are worthy, could you publish them in The Beat Within and send me the volume that it will be featured in? Thank you in advance! Also, I'm in the Corcoran SHU, waiting to be put up for transfer but this will probably be a while, so don't hesitate to subscribe me. Worse come to worse; I will diligently inform you if I transfer. Promise!

Well, this concludes my letter, a firm salute to the advocate of the struggle. "We know that we must stand and fight for an upward movement for the human family. Our tasks are laid at our doors, by grace and blood these tasks shall be unflinchingly performed."

Each day is a struggle —— but it can't last
You said it yourself; "this too will pass"
Up ahead mother! The road gets smooth
Persevere queen the future looks promising for you

You Make Me Feel Brand New

My love I'll never find the words my love
To tell you how I feel my love
Mere words could not explain
Precious love whenever I was insecure
You build me up and made me sure
You gave my pride back to me
Precious love with you I'll always have a friend
You someone who I can depend
To walk a path that sometimes bends
God bless you, you make me feel brand new
Without you life has no meaning
For God blessed me with you
You make me feel brand new
I sing this song to you 'cause
You make me feel brand new
Precious love with you I'll always have a friend
You're someone who I can depend
To walk a path that sometimes bends
Taught me how to live again
You created everything I am
Only you cared when I needed a friend
Believed in me time and again
This song is for you and with gratitude and love
God bless you
You make me feel brand new
For God bless me with you
You make me feel brand new
I sing this song for you
You make me feel brand new

DONTE ***This issue is filled with love and we love it — people must be getting hit by the love bug. We know that when people get locked up, it's real easy to get lonely and so they reach out to those that they like being with most. And that's usually their lover on the streets. Whatever the case we like seeing all the love in the air because there's so much hate out here nowadays... He's writing from Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, CA. And like we said about the other dedications, we hope this girl gets hers because we know it'll bring warmth to her heart...***

I Will Always Be There For You

I've never known someone like you before
Someone who makes me feel loved
I want to be the one that you are thinking of
The one who brightens your day
'Cause there's nobody else who makes me
Feel the way you do
I promise I'll always be true
And if you ever feel the need to be loved
Let me be the one your thinking of
'Cause I will make it so right
Forever and ever
I will always be there for you
I will always be there for you
'Cause there's nobody else who can make me
Feel the way you do
I promise I'll always be true
And if you ever feel the need to be loved
Let me be the one your thinking of
'Cause I will make it so right baby...
I got to tell you what I'm feeling in my heart
I wrote this song just to say
No ones ever gonna love me
Nobody like you
I'm yours from this very day

BRIAN STAFFORD ***Parole hearings can be the worst things in the world to have to go through. Most of the time you know you're not getting out and yet you still have to sell yourself in front of virtual strangers who already have developed a negative picture of you from reading your file. It's a very stressful situation that can drive a person crazy. Well, this next writer, who happens to be Keith Smith's cellie, writes to us after having his first parole hearing. He's serving a long sentence, so he probably knew the outcome before going in, but still hope is always there, and to have parole denied could send your hopes crashing down. But instead of letting it eat him up inside, he decided to release and relay that experience to us. And we are very grateful for that. Anyhow, he's writing from the California Department of Corrections in San Diego, CA, and we hope to hear from him again soon.***

A Thought For Today

Today I sat and looked at my life up to this point. I looked at the highs and the lows, the joy and laughter as well as the pain, the tears, which were shed when I was born, and the tears, which cried out when I was given a sentence of 33 years to life. None of these things can I change nor rectify.

"Friendship: was once a gift which I gave freely," and those whom I gave of this gift were the ones who betrayed me the most.

"Love," there can never be such a thing, considering all of those who claimed to be loyal, but where are they now?

"Hate." What does it mean? I harbor none, for I can only hate when I am the object of the ill feelings.

Today these things went through my mind as I drifted off into a light sleep. I can't explain why, yet it is the answer that I seek, when or where I will find it I do not know but I will continue to strive and seek the answers to these things.

It Just Didn't Pay

As I sit back now and reflect on the things I have done in my life,
It just doesn't seem to weigh out to the price I am now paying
All of the drug deals, making thousands a day,
Even the dreams now seem so far away
The women that I had by my side while the money changed hands
They faded into my memories when the snitch took the stand
The cars and material things that I once valued so much
I watched it all come to the courtroom on a police evidence truck
Now that I have been away for the past eight years
My name barely rings a bell, "Damn! Ain't that some shhh"
All of the time that I spent making my name in the game
And now it is forgotten,
My enemies laughed as the sentence came down
Soon I will be up for parole, and I will never again
Be able to roam freely in my own hometown
The life that I took meant nothing at the time
But I now have to live with it with each and every newspaper headline
Parole is "DENIED" the governor screams, for this black man in chains
As I leave the room with my head down in shame
Another eight years before I can return
I have become a slave to politics, now everyone gets a turn
My family, I still see some, but even those who said
They would always be there for me have grown tired of the same old song
I guess that it's the price you pay when you play the game
I just hope that the next player will learn the rules
Then maybe things for me will change

JAMES ***We've never witnessed so much power and courage until we started hearing of this next writer's situation and the honesty he displays in expressing it. And what a sad situation it is. 'The Beginning Of The End' is a piece he wrote after taking a deal for 35 years with two life sentences. Yes, you heard us right... that was the 'deal.' Still a child like the ones you see in school complaining about doing homework. Still a child like the ones you see at the local park and rec playing ball. Still a child, but now forced to grow up way faster than he should have to, due to a very poor choice he made as a child. So, what child is prepared to deal with such a sentence? He hasn't even lived as many years as they're giving him... And the way he describes it makes it more sad... We're not pitying him at all, it's just it's obvious he's still a child when you read his writing. Not because his writing isn't up to par or anything like that. He's an excellent writer. But you can still see the innocence of a child going to grab a cookie in the cookie jar only to get caught and have to suffer the consequences. His reaction is exactly the same... shock, instant regret, and maybe hope for a second chance to even have the choice of whether or not to go in the cookie jar again. It brings tears to our eyes to read about the feelings he felt when his mother hugged him and told him she'd always love him no matter what. Talk about two different extremes... the genuine love of a mother and the vengeful wrath of a courtroom. We really appreciate James and his connection with us. We envy his strength because we know in a situation like that, even the best of us would crack... Well, not this young warrior, who's writing from a juvenile hall south of San Francisco. We look forward to grow with you, with the hope to remain in correspondence with you even after you leave the hall...***

The Beginning Of The End

Saludos Beaters and Beat-ettes. Before I go any further with this missive/piece, allow me to extend my utmost love, honor y respeto to you all in full. Furthermore, I could only hope that when these lineas do meet your eyes that they have found you in the best of both health and spirits as for in a state of clarity under the guidance of the most high.

Well, damn homies, I must say that these last few weeks have been the hardest of my life. About a month ago I had written a piece in which I had mentioned I would be taking a plea bargain of 34 years with two life sentences. But after thinking about it and analyzing my situation, I decided not to go with that plea bargain, and instead to take my chances with trial. I was strongly advised against this for if found guilty, my sentence would be three times more than that 34 with two "Ls." But I continued to insist on going to trial so my attorney had no other choice but to comply with my wishes.

A week ago we started our pretrial motions and jury selection, and from the start things were not going in our favor, what with the judge denying most of our motions and obliging with the DA's. My attorney kept telling me we should settle because as we were going along, doors just kept shutting for us. She even went as far as to telling me, "Look, to be honest, I really think we're gonna lose!" But my stubbornness wasn't allowing me to hear any of it, so I continued to insist that we go to trial.

Yesterday, November 2, 2006, we empanelled a group of twelve people who were to be the jury in my case. Just by some of the answers they had for the DA's questions, I knew they would be in favor of a conviction. So I stated to talk to my co-partner about how maybe we should consider settling. At first they weren't offering the homie a deal, and me being the one that did the crime that he also got charged for, I felt I couldn't desert him at a time like this. So I talked with my attorney and told her that if the homie gets a deal and takes it then I'll take mine, but if he doesn't, then I will not take my plea bargain and I will be going to trail.

Today, November 3, 2006, I had a visit with my attorney in which she told me that the DA had offered my co-partner a deal of 20 with an "L" and me added a year to the deal I was gonna take which would now be 35 with two "Ls." She also told me that I would be going to court today at 1:30 to enter my plea. I was light weight happy because they offered the homie what they did. But when I talked to him, it turns out he doesn't wanna take it, and insists we go to trial. I was sitting there telling him that we were gonna lose. But he still refused to settle. Earlier in the day when my attorney came to see me here at the hall, I told her I would take it since the homie is taking it, but when she went to go see me while I was in the holding cell, I told her I would be going to trial since my co-partner is not accepting the deal. Little did I know that I didn't really have a choice because it was a package deal, meaning that if one of us didn't take it, the other couldn't take it.

Well, finally after being in the holding cell for about four hours, they took us into the courtroom where my attorney tells the judge that I'm in the situation where if my homie take it, I will, but if not, then no. Hearing this, the judge looks at the homie and ask what he's gonna do. After some hesitation, the homie says he just can't accept a deal. When these words left his mouth, I must admit it felt like my heart stopped. The judge then said we'd be taking a 15-minute recess. Once he exited the courtroom, everybody got on the homie's case trying to convince him. He was still refusing till the DA mentioned that if he takes the deal now, he won't be charging him with another murder that another one of the homies allegedly did. My co-partner's dad was talking to him from the audience chairs telling him that taking the deal would be the best thing for him right now and to just be smart. Like a minute before the judge came back into the courtroom, the homie said "whatever ill take it."

So today on November 3rd, 2006, my co-partner and I pled guilty to two counts of second degree murder and two counts of attempted murder with a gang enhancement for the home boy and gun and gang enhancements for me — which has landed him with 20 with two life sentences and me with 36 with two life sentences. As I was pleading guilty to these charges that two months short of three years ago changed my life forever, I couldn't help but feel this never-felt-before sadness and wondered where my life got so bad. I could hear my poor mother crying behind me, and I just wanted to get up to comfort her and wipe away her tears. I regret so much all that I have put her through from not listening to her, to disrespecting her for being too strict, when through it all she was just trying to look out for me.

When I couldn't take it no more and I looked back to see her, my mind was flooded with memories of when she would sit me on her lap and tell me in Spanish, "Mijo, when you grow up you're gonna be so successful you gonna have all this money and we could move away to a big house in my country, just me and you." I was also thinking back when she would hold my hand when we crossed the street, or tie my shoe laces that would always come undone. I can't imagine what she felt while sitting there listening to her first-born son plead guilty to murder.

What really broke my heart was when the sheriff allowed for her to come up and give me a hug. Just seeing her face in so much pain and so many tears coming out of her eyes made me want to hold her and tell her that I'm sorry for everything, which is exactly what I did. She told me that no matter what she'd always love me, and I must admit that it took a lot for me not to start shedding some real tears of sadness right there and then. I just wish I would've listened to her when I first started to get into problems.

Hopefully my little carnalitos will learn from my mistakes and realize that this life really ain't no joke. Strive to be something homies, so this cycle of us catching "ells" (L's) can be broken. Because, yeah, you laugh at this little stupid program here or at the ranch, or you may even laugh at alternative or Y.A. programs, but when your whole natural life is on the line or they're giving you double-digit years like candy, then things just don't seem too funny anymore...

Lastly, the first time I get to go before the parole board (to be denied) I'll be fifty years old, so watch out for that.

Just by some of the answers they had for the DA's questions, I knew they would be in favor of a conviction.

Inside The Mind Of A Convicted Criminal

Heavenly Fatha', I can't seem to find the solace of sleep!
Can't seem to realize inna' poise or any degrees of serenity –
Lord, have mercy;
(I'm unda' siege!)
And even in the dim lit quiescence of the night,
Thangs ain't right;
They gotta man's spirit and mind engaged
In the weird and ruthless fight;
'Cause now, see, I can actually feel the finga' of fear – touchin' me;
And I can also hear the sinista' whispa' (whistlin') of the hauntin' sounds round about me;
A tauntin' mockery and a teasin' misery – Lord! Am I going crazy!?
Or, is it just my mind falterin'
From all the dirty tricks they playin' on me?
Scarcely can a ninja see...
The difference between the two hearts of the beast;
Grim and grisly Black gangsta' constantly on the creep – believe me!
Lack wit' racist hybrids practicing their prison politricks – inverted violence!
Lunatic and sadistic war games bein' played on the celestial plane – I can't deny it!
Inexpressible pressa' and pain pushin' hard in this devil's domain;
Invisible blood stains on the official sigils of powa' – a dam' shame!!
So, don't listen to the dramatic tales they be tellin' you, cause' Blacks be throttled and subdued;
And I ain't the one to explain and excuse how quick these cowards will flip and beat on you;
Cause early one monin' I heard a wicked s-toned whistle – it's all spiritual!
And I remember one last Black soul made the fatal mistake of voicin' his personal dissent (apolitical!)
Against a certain body of the so-called Black gangsta' – he shouldn't of did it;
Cause' swift came about six who viciously swung hateful and heartless fists and kicks – they killed 'em;
Stumpt the dumb and the slow into oblivion – a strange fulfillment realized in Black on Black murda;
And they all caught life sentences in the twinklin' of an eye –
So don't cry! Cause' you deserve it;
Listen to me now!! Cause' I know what I speak and I know what I see;
California convicts on hands and knees –
Bowed down befo' the deformed feet... of the Beast;
Books wide open but they still can't read 'em,
Cause these issues are all maddenin' and misleadin'
Specialized shifts in modern penal punishment – now envision this;
Entire prison populations struck down dumb with astonishment
Steept in a stygian darkness, blunderin', gropin' fo' light, fumblin' –
Ultimately tumblin' toward the "Divine Comeuppance"
Lord! Lord! How deep is this Bottomless Confusion?
I plead with thee to tell me;
How long must me suffa' this satanic persecution? –
The wrong people sittin' in seats of power;
A network of mindless evil
Encirclin' everything beautiful in the dark hour;
Woe, I say! to the sad-sacks and mad-caps and the wolf-packs here
And now devoured;
Lord, pleeeeze! Rememba' me – the condemned man

DEMETRI ***Writing from the RJ Donovan Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in San Diego, CA, we bring to you a philosopher of sorts. He starts us off with a poem titled, "Inside The Mind Of A Convicted Criminal," where he talks to God and asks Him to have mercy on him. He uses a lot of thought provoking words to express the depth of his ideas. He then concludes with somewhat of a letter to us and we couldn't ask for more. Read on and let us know what you think of his writing...***

All of these unseen soldiers (hell-sent!) are the real forces behind drug/alcohol consumption and relapse, as well as the high rate of recidivism. As a matter of fact, I trace my present re-imprisonment directly back to these creeping spirits.

Now Then

With all that being said, it is mine honest and earnest hope that I have proven myself worthy of receiving a reply. I am in the unique position to do a meaningful service, and, I aim to fulfill my destiny – where so ever the tides of resistless fate might take me. But, now, in coming to a close, there is one more point of importance that I want to make perfect and sharp: namely, the "Racist Spirits of Hatred" that haunts Southern California in a way that exceeds the dismal spectacles of racism characteristic of the initial development of the United States.

Something has happened — something quite supernatural is now being realized and it lends eerie strength to this "Racist Spirit of Hatred" that actually cast a morbid fog places, like Los Angeles, and charges the atmosphere with a tension that is unseen but deeply felt. The orb of influence of this "Racist Spirit of Hatred" is wide and strong. What is worse, however, is that this "Racist Spirit of Hatred" does not corrupt and kill by itself. It is accompanied by a number of other skulking spirits of evil – namely, vanity, jealousy, selfish and sordid passions, brilliant smiles with hidden motives, envy, fear, ignorance, unnatural affection, sadism, dissimulation, and other evil spirits that I am not gifted to rightly define. All of these unseen soldiers (hell-sent!) are the real forces behind drug/alcohol consumption and relapse, as well as the high rate of recidivism. As a matter of fact, I trace my present re-imprisonment directly back to these creeping spirits.

But, as I have hinted at afore, the chieftain here is racism – human hatred and deception. Obviously, we might say the race hate is elaborately bedecked in deception. People think to raise human consciousness with a lying master grip of human hatred – it will never work! Thus, please, do not expect for me to mince words or show mercy to the unmerciful. I will, and must! Bow to higher orbs of influence where with I shall be as unbiased and comprehensive as is within my power – but, I will not lie or distort the truth when I know what it is.

Sincerely Purposeful,

SARA WATERS ***Writing from the Pennsylvania Department Of Corrections in Cambridge Springs, PA, we give you this self-proclaimed first timer... She said she read a Beat and was inspired by a piece written by Johnnie. We love hearing how this publication works on so many levels. We love that it offers hope and faith where hope and faith is easily lost. And as you can see, you don't have to be from the bay area to reap the incredible benefits of reading and writing for The Beat. She also gives her creations to us; one of which was inspired by Johnnie, but to her future ex, John. She then closes with a piece that would've been a great contender for our last contest, too bad it was too late. She says if she could turn back the hands of time, she'd rewind the time back to when she had her baby son in her arms.***

My Life

There are sudden rips. There are tears in your life, deep knife wounds that slash through your flesh. Your life is one thing, then it is shredded into another. It comes apart as though it has been gutted. And then there are those moments when your life simply unravels — a loose thread is pulled, a seam gives way. The change is always slow at first nearly imperceptible.

At this moment my life is just a bunch of threads rolled into a never-ending string of bad events And all I can do is ask myself why I let it get this bad, so fast? Get a hold of life, before it's too late! Be easy!

A Butterfly Said To Me...

Humility and humble beginnings, are roots to everlasting grace.
So why worry in a world where it has no place?
Your extremities
Are the creator's opportunities.
So lift your head to the sky,
Because you know I used to crawl, but now I can fly!

Dear Beat

I know as I have read, that you are currently not accepting submissions for the 15th editorial Note writing contest titled "Turning Back The Hands of The Time." But I feel as if I needed to share this with you. Here goes.

To turn back one's time in this life is impossible, yet so many of us outcasts seems to always wish we could. If only for a moment. If I had a chance to turn back the hands of time, I would only go back 2 years to when my little man was 2 years old, and right before I came to prison. If I'd only have known then, what I know now, I would memorize the sound of my son's voice and play it over and over in my head. The sound of him laughing and the honest closeness and gentle touch of my mother. I would've spent a lot of time with a little boy with soft hands. Hands I've held so many times, yet not enough.

I'm haunted by memories of that little boy being yelled at for some unremembered mistake he made. That little boy sad and ashamed because I was upset with everything else at the time, besides the small mistake he made. Do you know or have any idea what I would give to reclaim the very last moment I yelled at that precious little boy? I wonder how many tears I've shed as I prayed for the time to rewind itself so I could play w/ him for just one more day — to share his simple world. To be able to hear his laughter and the joy that is in it. Feel the touch of those little hands and to be called mommy for just one day, I don't know if there is any way possible to turn back the hands of time. But after countless nights alone in a dark prison cell I do know exactly what I'd do if I could, I would feel a gentle loving touch from soft little hands and never let them go again.

What It Do Beat

First-timer here. I just recently got my hands on an issue of The Beat, and I have to tell you that there is some amazing writing in there. I would like to comment on Johnnie Michael's Beauty Part Three. It's almost like I needed to read that. I've been in a relationship for 5 years with a man I can't leave no matter how bad I want to and that writing (well, letter) gave me a new sense of hope. So I think I'm writing him a letter finally to tell him how I feel.

And to Johnny, I hope you found the right one for you this time. It's one of the hardest things in life to accomplish, you know finding your "soul mate." Also please let Johnny know he gave me the inspiration to send in my latest work called, 'To John,' who is my boyfriend hopefully ex soon. Thanks Johnny you're my inspiration. I thought I found mine but I was wrong.

I sent a few of my own writing that I hope you could include in your next newsletter. Also can I get a subscription? The name's Sara by the way. I'm 24 and in state in Cambridge Springs PA. Hope to hear from you until then. Be easy. I give permission for the following poems and writings to be printed. Also if possible could I get a response.

Much Love

Do you know or have any idea what I would give to reclaim the very last moment I yelled at that precious little boy? I wonder how many tears I've shed as I prayed for the time to rewind itself so I could play w/ him for just one more day — to share his simple world.

To John

You could have it all,
My empire of dirt.
I will let you down,
I will make you hurt.
I wear this crown of thorns,
Upon my liar's chair
It is simply something
I cannot repair
Beneath the stains of time
The feelings disappear
You seem like someone else
Why am I still here?
What have I become my friend?
Everyone I love, seems to go away in the end!
If I could start again,
A million miles away
I would keep just myself.
I would find a way.
I will keep on going,
I will have no fear.
And when I get to where I'm going,
Please don't cry for me
Down here!

THE BEAT WITHOUT

Today you and me are forced to look at the choices we have made in the past. Whether we sit in juvenile hall or after-school workshops. It's time to take a stand before it's too late.

KEITH SMITH ***Every time this man writes it's to the youth. All of his pieces are titled, "To Our Youth." He grew up in East Palo Alto and often gives words of advice to those that are growing up there, or even growing up period. He shares his experiences in hopes that he might help some kids avoid some of the mistakes he made and that's redemption at its finest. We wonder what Keith would say to a young person if they asked an obvious question such as, "Why do you seem to care more about us than your own situation?" For like we said, he's always writing to our youth. We wonder if he's somehow writing to the young him but just addressing it to all young people. Well, it's at least something to think about. He's writing from the California Department of Corrections in San Diego, CA. And for whatever reason it doesn't matter, as long as he keeps offering words of encouragement. Thank you...***

Reaching Out Again

I am reaching out again to the youth that's tired of faking like they belong to the streets. I refuse to believe that you are happy because I've been there, acting like it was all good until I got home and reality caught up with me. I would try to put it out of my mind, but it remained there until one of my partners would show up with his bag of dreams – weed, drinks, ex, and scheme on getting over. The next time you see reality is at juvenile hall. I found myself asking myself why do I refuse to be myself and keep being the victim.

Poor choices always put us in a situation that seems unfair to us but it's just us getting what we got coming because we are scared to share and ask questions about peer pressure that's around us. Moms and pops, even teachers, are there for you. You must stop thinking you are all alone because that's not true. Talk to a friend if you are having a problem with peer pressure in school or after school. I know sometimes it can be scary and if you don't talk to anyone you will become a victim.

What I'm saying is take control of your life and start getting involved in your community and help it become a safer place to live. I am proud to say there are now positive programs in East Palo Alto. But if you never seek them you'll never know what they got to offer. It's time to step up to the plate and see what's up and if you are in juvenile hall, talk to your P.O. about programs in your community because if you are sincere about helping yourself, I believe they will be sincere about helping you make that change. We have to start trusting people so they can start trusting us to change our poor choices. It's never too late to change. Anything the mind can believe the mind can achieve! Pass it on!

To Our Youth...

Today you and me are forced to look at the choices we have made in the past. Whether we sit in juvenile hall or after-school workshops. It's time to take a stand before it's too late.

I remember wanting to grow up so fast that I missed the adventures of growing up. I stopped going to the gym with my friends. I stopped talking to my parents about my day in school. My homework didn't matter anymore. A lot of us just went to school to hangout and fit in. If you're maybe sitting in juvenile hall or at the after-school workshops that means it's not too late, because you are hearing these words.

Like those in many communities, you might go to the store and see people hanging out, trying to act like they are having fun. Believe that a lot of them will end up where I'm at, in prison, because I refused to listen to my parents and teachers, because I thought I knew it, and was too cool and didn't want anyone to call me a (square). So I started acting like I was having fun sneaking in the house late at night when my parents fell asleep. I was getting lost in the street life, and sometimes I would pray to God to help me, change my life back, so I don't end up living on the street.

You're maybe telling the person sitting next to you that you would never wind up on the street corner, hanging out with the fellas, trying to fit in, and I truly hope not. When I was a youth, I lived in East Palo Alto, in the Bay Area, and thought standing around the store on Clark Street was really cool. But I kept going to juvenile hall and then jail. I have reached the last stop, and I'm telling you parts of my life because I don't want none of you to end up here. It's not too late to change because change is good and remember what I always say: your past don't have to be your future. Tell a friend so they can tell a friend. That's part of growing.

RAY SANCHEZ JR. ***Most people have respect's definition twisted with fear. Well not one of our favorite thinkers and writers to have ever written for The Beat. Ray Sanchez is a master at piecing words together to paint a picture that reflects his wonderful ideas. He's like a composer and a conductor all in one... And as you can see we're all on his jock... But if you read on, you'll see it's for good reason... We hear people throwing the word respect around as if it's nothing, but in a place where respect (or lack of) is probably the number one factor in surviving, our Beat educator breaks it down to the lowest compound for us. We can always count on him for that. Thank you for being everything you are, Ray, we really enjoy your presence in our lives... Ray Sanchez wrote this poem from Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, CA***

Respected?

Respected?
Forget it?
The respect was resented and simply synthetic
Respect was kinetic and badly misrepresented
What was known as respect was actually fear
Fear somehow accepted
Fear I helped to install
And now I regret it
Did ya' respect my name or the backing of my claim?
I suspect it wasn't my actions as a man
But the blade that was made by my own two hands
Respect me?
You don't even know me

Homie
Nicknames ain't the same as the real
By definition: quite phony
Did ya' respect the heart that drives my soul?
Or just fear the depths to which
You expect me to go?
Did ya' even ask what makes me tick
Or just hear 'bout where I'm from
And respect my click?
With all due respect
Forget what I used to represent
What I was banging on the set
Or on the mission to which I was sent
Instead get inside my head
And inspect the fuel that causes my heart to progress
And protect
Those who I suspect have much less
Wouldn't you consider it common sense
To protect your seed from coke and meth
Yet you respect boys
Who slang poison to pregnant moms in the jects
Respect?
Your respect is pathetic
'Cause as long as you respect a thug who's aggressive
Your respect is misdirected
I suggest you correct it
'Fore you're locked in a pen, dead
Or in witness protection

ERIC MILLS ***It motivates us to know that people are really out there appreciating the work we do so much that they'd like to collaborate. We love it... This next writer, who's writing from San Quentin State Prison in San Quentin, CA, hits us with a letter explaining how he's doing and then a poem to his wife, which is pretty creative. He gives us words and phrases that are often used in today's society and then gives his own meaning as how they relate to his wife. We have a feeling she's going to love this issue a whole lot, so we're going to cut this intro short and try to get it there ASAP...***

What Up Beat

How are you guys doing? I am cool, I wanted to send you this poem that I wrote for my wife, who means the world to me. Even though I am in a place like this, I never give up faith and hope. My goal for when I get out is to work with at risk youth so they will never have to suffer this pain that we all go through here.

It's time for all of us to take back the streets and help our community. A lot of us started all of those things that are going on in the streets today. We need to start being positive role models and keepers of peace. We have a program here called no more tears. What it's about is stopping the violence in our communities and how we as a people can learn how to do this with positive action.

I was wondering maybe you guys could come in and run a workshop, so all of us can get the message out, that prison isn't the place to be, killing people isn't the thing to do, selling dope isn't the way to go. So if you would like, let me know, and I can talk to the program manager. The "No More Tears" program is sponsored by Center Force. You can check out the website at centerforce.org. I hope that we could collaborate together for our change in the community. Please send more Beat issues, I love to hear what the youth have to say. Please put me on the subscription list.

Brenda What These Words Mean To Me

Love: Never experienced it until I met you
True Love: Never experienced it until I fell in love with you
Beauty: Never knew what was beautiful until I laid my eyes on you
Angel: You are a blessing and a gift from God
Goodness: Never knew what goodness was until you showed me.
Your Heart: It's made of platinum
Age: You will never get old
My Heart: It belongs to you
Keys: You have them to my heart
Lock: Only you can unlock it.
Embrace: I wish I could hold you
Comfort: I wish I could comfort you.
Tears: I wish I could wipe them away.
Kiss: I wish I could only have one
Happy: I wish I could make you happy
Sadness: I wish you were never sad
Loneliness: I wish I could be there, so you would never be lonely
Laughter: I wish you could hear it
Joy: You give it to me
Mind: You are always in it.
Smile: Yours is flawless
Body: Yours is perfect
Love: I admit it, I am in love with you.
I love you XOXO

BILLY GOSNELL ***The holidays are near, the rain is falling, and it's a time for romance. During a time where people would rather be in their house cuddled up than out and about soaking in the rain, he gives us a package that reminds us of this. He's writing from N.A. Chaderjian (a Youth Authority (CYA) institution) in Stockton, CA. In his letter he gives us the sweetest props. It's letters like these that keep us motivated in doing what we're doing. For all the people hating on us, it's nice to hear that we mean something to those who really matter. Hopefully his girl can get this issue in her hands because we'd really enjoy imagining her with a smile on her face. Thanks Billy...***

I'll Bring You The Stars

As I bow on my knees
I want to confess
The love that I feel I cannot express.
I search for the words only to find an emotion so strong
Words can't define.
I say that I love you with all my heart,
The words that I use could reach to the stars
But the way that I feel can pass that by far
Even circle the galaxy and bring you the stars
I guess those expressions are hard to find
But the love that we feel we share in this time
And to ever think that those stars will go dim
And the galaxy be blown away by a wind
Is a spark of doubt that we ever began.
So I shed my tears to extinguish the spark
I think of you to exit the dark
I look at our picture to bring out the light
And deep down inside I knew you were right.
Back to reality here in my cell
Thirty-four days 'till I exit this hell.
I know we can do it we've made this far
So stick with me baby I'll bring you those stars.

This Is A Note To My Fiancé Charli Renee

Baby I know I got us into this situation and this is hell for us both.
Each day that passes brings us one day closer to home
But it's also one more day that keeps us apart
And the realization of it being my fault
Causes the guilt to tear me apart.
A missed day from being with you is hell
And a million sorrys could not bring back one second
That we have lost in these eight months
I love you and our love is strong.
You are my inspiration as I am yours also.
I want the world to know my love for your personality
And so much more.
You patched up a heart that felt doomed with your love
And I wanna give it all back to you baby girl.
Smile 'cause you know I love you

To The Beat Within

Hello my name is Billy D. Gosnell. I'm in the Youth Authority in Chad. My homie shot me a copy of your Beat Within volume 10.41 and man you people are real and the people who send you these poems and art and man just the letters are real and I'm feeling it. I give you and all the others involved with this props to the sky. I'm hoping that these items I'm sending to you can be published and that I can subscribe to your magazine. Well, either way you all are real and doin' great with your work hope you like the art, and poem.

This poem was written two months ago in dedication to my fiancé Charli Renee. I have been with her for a year on August 15th, 2006 and just since I violated my parole of February 6Th. Our relationship has grown and our love has grown beyond human expression. In the 7 months we have had a few small trust problems but have over come them through expression of concern and feelings and have grown to be very secure with each other and our relationship.

Love is powerful and with it we can over come any obstacle, much love to those in other institutions. Be strong for who you love and for yourself.

Lost/Have

Jesus answered, "It is written:
Man does not live on bread alone,
But on every word from the mouth of God,
I have held many things in my hands
And I have lost them all.
But whatever I have placed in God's hands
That I still possess.

DAVID ***Sending us four quick poems from N.A. Chaderjian, a Youth Authority institution in Stockton, CA, this next writer has plenty of lessons to teach. He talks about everything ranging from motivation to having and losing, which really speaks for how open-minded he is. And though his poems are really short, they encompass a whole lot of thought. We think you should read them to get inspiration. And hopefully the Youth Authority won't discourage him from continuing***

Motivation

When things seem dark and hard
And difficult to face,
The memory of that face, (lil' bro)
Helps me in my race
For all of life is like that race
With ups and downs and all.
And all you have to do to win
Is rise each time you fall
"Quit, give up, your beaten!"
They still shout in my face.
But another voice within me says:
"Get up and win the race."

For all of life is like that race
With ups and downs and all.
And all you have to do to win
Is rise each time you fall

The Power Of Attitude

Our lives are not determined by what happens to us,
But how we react to what happens,
Not by what life brings to us,
But by the attitude we bring to life,
A positive attitude causes a chain reaction
Of positive thoughts,
Events and outcomes,
It is a catalyst...
A spark that creates extraordinary results.

Wisdom/Knowledge

To be who you really are is the easiest and hardest thing
You will ever do,
Good thoughts and actions can never produce bad results,
Bad thoughts and actions can never produce good results,
Good thoughts bear good fruit,
Bad thoughts bear bad fruit,
Man and woman can find truth
Connected with him/her being if they
Will dig deep into the mind
Of their soul.

ADRIAN ***Probably one of the hardest things to deal with while being locked up is leaving the ones you love behind for however long you have to do. Or even worse, them leaving you behind. It's difficult to have a romantic relationship, last from when you went in to when you're getting out. Life moves on for the rest of the world when we're incarcerated and we stay stuck in our past memories until we get out and can create new ones. This next writer gives us two poems he obviously has written to his other half... And we have to say that these are those kind of poems people want to copy and send to their own lovers. He's writing from N.A. Chaderjian (a Youth Authority institution) in Stockton, CA. We love his poetry and we know she will too.***

Thank You

Thank you for being true
You're one of the last friends I have
And you're the one helping me get through
Your words are an inspiration to me
They keep me going
Every time I see your picture, I smile, you should see
I know I hurt you before
But you are still there for me
For these reasons and you, I still adore
I love you with all my heart
Sometimes I wish we would be together
And we would never be apart
But I know for right now we can't be
It's not the right time
So I continue to wait for you to be with me
For now we'll be best friends forever
And nothing can change that
I will always be there for you whenever
So thank you for being my true friend
Me and you always and forever
From now till the very end.

No More Tears

I've fed you too many lies
I see you hurting inside
Please, no more tears from your eyes
I confused your mind
Got you going in circles
Now I got your life all in a bind
Trying to say all the right things to get you back
Cause I know I messed up
Just help me to fix the things I lack
I don't know how many times I have to say
That I'm sorry for everything I've done to you
I'm surviving for you and our son day by day
The love I got for you is like a natural high
Every time we talk on the phone
Hearing your voice, I never want to say goodbye
I know I've been gone for way too long
Got you sitting at home confused
You don't have to tell me twice, I know I was wrong
So please give me one last chance
To fix my mistakes
I know in your heart there's still a spark of romance
So no more lies
No more hurting inside
And please, no more tears from your eyes.

I don't know how many times I have to say
That I'm sorry for everything I've done to you
I'm surviving for you and our son day by day

BROTHA BARIDI *Oh, how we miss the days when rap wasn't just used to floss what you got, or show off to the world how many girls you'd been with. We miss the days when rap was used to tell stories, influence political movements, and kick start revolutions. Nowadays, people are leanin' and rockin' wit' it, shakin' that Laffy Taffy, and even literally goin' dumb. It's all about beats nowadays, not about lyrics. And in this steady decline in the meaning of rap, pioneers like Tupac are being forgotten. This next writer brings these people back into the discussion where they need to be. We can't forget how influential rappers like Tupac were in our struggle to be understood. And now that he's gone it seems like we don't even understand ourselves, but who cares, that's why we're going dumb, right? Well, Brotha Baridi is keeping intelligent by being aware of this and paying tribute to someone who really deserves it. Face it, without Tupac we wouldn't even have a Beat right now. He started more than you know. Well, Brotha Baridi writes to us from Pelican Bay State Prison in Crescent City, CA, and we're thankful that he talked about something worth talking about...*

In Memory And Reflections Of Tupac

Most of us have heard that wise African proverb that says, "It takes a village to raise a child." Yet, at the same time, so many of us so easily disregard this wisdom as another one of those cliché (old sayings). And while such an attitude toward this important Humyn principle is understandable in this day and age, when the widening generational gap between the older generations and today's youth are adding to the problems we are facing in this world.

This is why the contributions of Brotha Tupac was so very important, in both reaching across to all age groups and providing a voice to the voiceless (and so often ignored) young people. Whether it was rapping about young teenage pregnancy in "Brenda Got A Baby," the lack of respect, love, care, honor, and appreciation for our women in "Keep Your Head Up," the endangered status of so many black males caught up within the criminal system of Injustice ("Just Us") in "Trapped," or recognizing the woman's worth and queenliness in "Dear Mama," or the many other important messages, Tupac expressed to the adults, parents, grandparents, activists, etc. The hurt, pain, anger, frustration, hopeless and despair of young people struggling to find ourselves in the cold, harsh realities of American racism, class differences, oppression, poverty, sexism, unemployment, massive imprisonment, mis-education, etc.

Many of the older generations had lost touch with this social outcast generations of young people. And this in turn allowed for those powers-that-be to operate the system's policies and institutions of their Good ole Boys' networks social control and repression to execute a low intensity warfare campaign via "Proposition 21," "three strikes," etc. toward these poor oppressed young rebellious youth.

Thanks to the ability of those young messengers like Tupac and others to reach out and connect with the older generations, we have appreciatively witnessed more and more of the older folks receptive and/or willingness to be open to sharing an attentive ear, open mind, understanding soul and caring heart toward the creative ideas, potential powers, thinking, actions, worldview of the young strugglers, fighters of today.

Tupac's light is shining upon the path of how we can build open lines of communication, without older and younger generations, get to better know, respect and understand each other. And work together through mutual respect to rebuild those real Humyn bridges that reconnect us today with our roots and learn those essential life lessons that the generations before us has experienced, learned from and is willing to pass on to the youth today for helping avoid some of those same "traps" that the real enemy of the people has and continues to set for us.

Strugglers

They came before us...
They are among us...
They will remain after us...

MARK FELIX *Short and to the point is this next writer's style. He wrote another short piece to us a while ago and now he's back true to form. In his poem, "Sometimes," he lets us know that people are too caught up in their own lives to recognize what's happening in the lives of those around them. And though it's short, his poem speaks volumes. He's writing from Phoenix, Arizona.*

Sometimes

Sometimes when you're sad
No one sees your tear,
Sometimes when you're worried
No one sees your fear,
Sometimes when you're excited
They can see your inner-child
Sometimes when you're happy
No one sees my smile.

TALIA *It's rare to come across a poet as talented as this next one. So rare that when you finally do come across one, you want to read their words over and over again to make sure you didn't miss anything. In her first poem, 'A Mocking Bird Sings,' she intelligently makes us aware that we need to start taking responsibility for our own actions. Not to say that we're totally responsible for everything we do, but in pointing the finger at everyone else, we're pointing three fingers at ourselves. She's writing from the Connecticut Correctional Facility in Niantic, Connecticut, and we've enjoyed reading her poems. She closed with a quick poem that offers faith to us all. A really amazing read, but don't just take our word for it. Read on...*

Recognition Of Oneself

I am my temple
And my temple is my own
Built on a foundation
That is made out of stone
Yet I feel alone as if my temple might collapse
All from the choice to choose and relapse
See I've dealt my cards in this here game
So when faced with trouble, only myself is to blame
So no more excuses, no more crying
Either I'll get clean or simply die trying.

A Mocking Bird Sings

Things we see, yet never saw coming
How do we stand still, yet feel like we're running?
Away from ourselves, most times we cause our own pain.
Constantly feeling as if we're going insane!
No one to blame, no lame excuse to use
Simply lack of understanding and the life styles we choose.
But this is a story of a tale never told
Of how one survives in a world so cold.
Not yet old, yet not quite young
I simply speak of a bird and a song once sung
See I was born into a family, half corrupt and crazy
With a father who wasn't a father rather just the nut that made me
You may be asking why I say the things I do
But you must realize he's been in jail since I was two
Murder was the case, sentenced to 25 to life
And then God took his soul like a thief in the night
A product of him, a mocking bird I be
On a road to destruction, simply trying to fly free.

The Beat Within

What's up my people? I hope all is good with you. As for me I'm just maintaining and keeping my mind at a structured level as always. Well the reason for this letter is to tell you how much The Beat Within has done for me, because before I started reading The Beat Within I felt like I had no family but The Beat Within just makes me feel so good inside. Makes me feel like I had a family that's real!

I support The Beat Within with all my heart! I just recently went to see the board of prison terms and I took The Beat Within book with me and the officer asked me why am I taking the book and I told him, "Because The Beat Within is my family and I'm taking them with me."

Well, the board liked how I was staying in contact with a positive place called The Beat Within and they gave me a release date! That means I don't have to do life in prison no more! I love you so much Beat Within! I'm shedding tears as I'm writing this letter; I'm trying not to get the paper wet. I will always love The Beat Within. When I came back to my cell yesterday from the board hearing I got my cellie to hook up the tattoo needle and I got Beat Within tattooed on my chest. I love you just like I love God!

BERNARD JACKSON ***For some The Beat is just another 'program' in juvenile hall, for others it's the only thing keeping their head above water, and for the next writer it even means more than that. The way he describes what The Beat has done for him, it kind of feels like this publication is his hero. So much so that he says he got Beat Within tatted on his chest. We find that kind of hard to believe, but if it's true, you can't deny his dedication. There are many people who come here every day to join in the potluck of giving voices to those who've had their voices taken away. He's writing from Pelican Bay State Prison in Crescent City, CA. Maybe next time we hear from him he'll be free with Beat Without tatted on his back. Thank you for all your kind words. We appreciate your loyalty to such a great thing...***

MIKEAVELLI ***This next writer confuses us a little bit, for though he offers advice to the younger generation to keep them out of the same situation he's in [serving a life sentence in Stanley Correctional Institution in Stanley, Wisconsin], he still seems to glorify the life he used to live. That's what's causing many of these young people to follow in your footsteps in the first place. When we explain our past lives with phrases like, "Did that time like a champ" and "a knight had to maintain authority, which meant bustin' heads and using knives," we tell the younger generation that it's cool to act that way as long as you don't get caught. The way we say things more often than not, are more powerful than the actual words we say. Keep that in mind next time you advise our young people. Other than that we really enjoyed your words of advice...***

Game Over

Thirteen years, five penitentiaries, no life, no family, just a knight left to face his opposition on his own; that is what my life is now. It started out all cool, got plugged as a young thug at the age of 10, reppin' this royal thing. By 11 I was in NYTC (Nevada) on my way to CYC (Nevada) to do a two year bit for bustin' at the man. Did that time like a champ. Fought daily to gain respect, got released to face some other charges in the CHI (Chicago). I was only supposed to do two years but a knight had to maintain authority, which meant bustin' heads and using knives. So I didn't make it out of St. Charles till a month before my 18th birthday.

Mom's moved me to Wisconsin and got me a job. But I had lived the "inside" life for so long that it was all I knew. So I started serving yay, poppin' at opposition and reppin' this thing. I was the man. People looked up to me. Everything was all good till I shot this guy for mean mugging me at the bus stop. That's when things got real.

Now I sit in the penitentiary for the rest of my life, all over my pride and a way of life. If y'all want to be like me, then keep going down the path a lot of y'all on.

Don't even trip, we got plenty room for you inside and the brothers always looking for new talent.

It ain't no game, it stopped being a game when the judge said... "I hereby sentence you to a term of life in the Wisconsin State Prison System without the possibility of parole."

Them ain't the words you want to hear. But they resound inside my head each day I wake up to this 10' x 5' cell and realize that the game is over.

It's been hells of a fight, what else can noble knight, write?

We are not only at war with the system but we are at war within the system with our fellow inmates. There is not much love in the chain gang and no unity. We are on our own here.

KENNETH FLOYD ***We've had this next writer in our pages before and we really enjoy his writing. This time is no different, in fact, we think he stepped it up a couple notches. He hits us with a quick poem about the turmoil he's dealing with inside the place he's in, which is the Apalachee Correctional Institution in Sneads, Florida. He concludes his packaged creations with a commentary about a very horrific experience he's witnessed. We've heard of people getting 'packed,' but for some strange reason when he describes it, it seems extra gruesome. We guess that's the mark of an amazing writer. He's served three years of a fifteen-year sentence, so let's continue to welcome him and remain the platform for which he can let his work shine...***

War Within

Growing opposition
With only words for ammunition,
Taking my life liberty.
They cross and discipline in barbaric control,
Amputating me from society.
We can't hide our face from them,
Oppression ruled by human degradation,
Incarceration of the poor and the addicted,
The freeing of the perverted who slay our little children.
Democracy is a joke!

A Bad Start

Four-thirty-a-m, Monday, September 25, 2006. I was awakened by screams, yelling, "Stop hitting me." And then the sound of a lock hitting a human skull over and over, blood splattered everywhere. The man lay in a pool of blood. The man's head looked like hamburger meat, every second a scream and then the lock hitting his skull.

"Stop hitting me," the man yelled, over and over. The man was trying to kill the other man. He had yanked him out of bed while he was sleeping and started pounding him with a lock. A big black man with a big heart put an end to the blows that were being inflicted on the man's head. He snatched the man with the lock off of the man and saved his life.

We are not only at war with the system but we are at war within the system with our fellow inmates. There is not much love in the chain gang and no unity. We are on our own here. I learned a valuable lesson today. Don't go to sleep in prison in the same room with someone that is mad at you. Get it straightened out before you go to sleep so you're not awakened with them getting it straightened out while you are asleep. There are a lot of unwritten rules a prisoner must live by. Some I don't like, but it's part of survival in the chain gang.

Deep in our hearts of 'hood hearts we know ain't nothing proud about being from the 'hood, unless you made it out of the hood alive and are moving forward from the bottom to the top of our goals, or from the deadened streets to becoming a changing influence in the ghetto community.

check out the rest of William Grajed's BWO piece on page 40